

LIFE OF THE PARTY: UNIONS AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERATE  
REPUBLICAN PARTY IN NASSAU COUNTY, NEW YORK

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A dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

Written under the direction of

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And approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

JANUARY, 2019

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

### **Life of the Party: Unions and the Making of the Moderate Republican Party in Nassau County, New York**

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Since county incorporation in 1899, the Nassau County Republican Party has identified with the moderate wing of the party. A key component of its moderate views lies in its support of workers and organized labor. This dissertation describes the evolution of the partnership between organized labor and the Nassau Republican Party and shows how organized labor contributed to the emergence of a strong political Republican machine. Support for organized labor became necessary to the survival and success of the Nassau County Republicans. At the same time, I argue, organized labor thrived in Nassau County in part because of its partnership with moderate Republicans. This mutually beneficial interaction continued into the twenty-first century, maintaining the Nassau County Republican Party as moderates even as the national GOP has moved to the extreme right.

Historians and scholars have studied the history of the Nassau County Republican Party and its rise as a powerful political machine. Little has been written, however, about the Long Island labor movement or its role in shaping the character of local or national politics. This dissertation places organized labor at the center of the story of moderate Republicanism in Nassau County. It relies primarily on local newspaper coverage, union records and two dozen oral history interviews with Nassau County politicians, union leaders and activists.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my thanks and deepest gratitude to my dissertation advisor, Dorothy Sue Cobble. Dorothy understood my passion and the need to tell this story about the working men and women of Long Island. Without her insight, understanding and patience, this project would not have been possible. Thank you, Dorothy. I would also like to thank the members of my committee Joshua Freeman, David Greenberg and Jennifer Mittelstadt for their comments and feedback. They saved me from committing grievous gaffes and provided valuable and helpful advice.

My children and their spouses served as a wonderful cheering section. Thank you David Clayman, Dr. Erin Poor, Rebecca Clayman and Michael Lingenfelter. They had faith in me even during the times when I felt little to none. A special thank you to kind friends who over the years patiently listened as I described my research and never once complained.

There is no better way to understand past events than to hear those who were there describe them. I want to thank all of the people, the politicians, union leaders and activists for freely sharing their thoughts, memories and ideas with me. I hope that this history fills in some of the blanks.

I want to dedicate this dissertation, with love, to my husband, Roger Clayman. It took a long time, with some interesting stops along the way. Thank you, Roger, for surrounding me with love, support, and encouragement for which I shall be forever grateful

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## **Introduction**

In 2008, Barack Obama was running as the Democratic nominee for president of the United States. In Nassau County, in New York, excited members of the Service Employees Union 1199 SEIU, a health-care workers union, boarded buses to campaign on his behalf.<sup>1</sup> In their easily identifiable bright purple shirts with “1199” emblazoned on the back, they fanned out to Ohio and Pennsylvania visiting union households and trying to convince their union brothers and sisters to vote for the Democrat. Back at home, 1199 SEIU took a decidedly different position. When it came to endorsing state senate candidates, they generally endorsed Republicans. They were not alone in their support of the GOP. Unions such as the large and powerful Civil Service Employees Association, the police union and the building trades joined them in supporting the Republicans.

Obama won Nassau County in 2008, handily trouncing his Republican opponent John McCain. Republican state senate candidates, however, fared better. While two Democrats rode to victory on Obama’s coattails, the rest of the state senate delegation from Nassau County remained Republican.<sup>2</sup> Prior to 2008, Nassau County voters supported the Democratic candidate for president only twice. In 1912, the county went Democratic and voted for Woodrow Wilson, following a split in the Republican Party between conservative William Howard Taft and progressive Theodore Roosevelt. In 1964, Nassau County supported Lyndon B. Johnson.<sup>3</sup> The county’s support of Republicans at the local level is even more striking. From 1916 until 1961, the Democrats won only one county office, and that was in 1929.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nassau County lies on the western edge of Long island. There are two counties on Long Island. Suffolk County which lies to the east of Nassau was established in 1683. Nassau County was incorporated in 1899. Areas of Brooklyn and Queens are on Long Island, but as boroughs of New York City, they are not considered “Long Islanders.” Edward J. Smits, “Government in Nassau: Its Formative Years 1900-1930,” *The Nassau County Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (1969):25; William S. Pelletreau, *Long Island: From Its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time, Vol. II*. New York: Lewis Publishing, 1905, 74. The Long Island labor movement originated in Nassau County, and Nassau County remains heavily unionized. It serves as the center of organized labor in Long Island, the fourth largest labor movement in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.elections.ny.gov/2008electionresults.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Howard A. Scarrow, “Presidential Elections in the Twentieth Century: Voting Patterns on Long Island,” *Long Island Historical Journal* Vol. 10, No.1. (Fall, 1997): 71-78.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis S. Ippolito, “Political Perspectives and Party Leadership: A Case Study of Nassau County, New York” (PhD diss. University of Virginia, 1967), 24. See also Herbert David Rosenbaum, “The Political Consequences of Suburban Growth: A Case Study of Nassau County, New York” (PhD diss. Columbia University, 1967), 51. From 1920 to 1964, Nassau Republicans consistently delivered Republican pluralities in all state and federal candidates. For gubernatorial candidates, the county delivered a mean of 63.4%.

When I asked union members how they explained why their unions supported the Democratic nominee for president while endorsing local Republicans for state assembly and state senate as well as several congressional candidates, they responded by saying that they were “Rockefeller Republicans.” Many said that in Nassau County, union support for local Republicans was the way things always had been. Others explained that as far back as they could remember, Long Island Republicans were generally supportive of labor, particularly public sector unions and the building trades.

Local union leaders agreed. One leader said that Long Island Republicans supported legislation important to his members. As long as they continued to vote for legislation benefitting his members, his union would continue to endorse them. Besides, he said, the Democrats in the state legislature were often too “city-oriented” and ignored the concerns of Long Islanders. Another union leader observed that Republican support for unions was pragmatic, a recognition that without the votes of working people and their unions, Republicans would lose elections.<sup>5</sup>

Republican elected officials who received labor’s endorsement readily acknowledged their support for organized labor. The Republican Supervisor of the Town of Hempstead at the time, Kate Murray, told me, “I take pride in union support.” Congressman Peter King, who often identified himself as a blue-collar conservative Republican, expressed a similar view.<sup>6</sup>

This dissertation examines the historical interaction between organized labor and the Nassau Republican Party over the course of the twentieth century. I argue that the Nassau Republican Party’s relationship with labor helped build it into a powerful political machine and that it was the Republican Party’s alliance with organized labor that kept it moderate. I begin by describing the origins of the alliance in the transactional relationship between construction workers and Nassau Republicans established at the turn of the twentieth century. I then explore how the relationship with the building trades unions in the American Federation of Labor (AFL), solidified in the 1920s and 1930s, and helped propel the Nassau Republicans to national political prominence.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Ianuzzi, interview by author, May 18, 2012; Ron Smith, interview by author, April 4, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Kate Murray, interview by author, June 5, 2013; Congressman Peter King, interview by author, March 28, 2013.

In the decades after World War II, a new group of labor leaders more closely linked to industrial workers and the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) formed an alliance with the Democratic Party and severely weakened Republican influence in the county. Yet Nassau County Democrats failed to build a political machine in the 1960s, and when defense contracts waned and industrial jobs disappeared, the alliance between organized labor and the Democratic Party fell apart. The dissertation concludes by examining how Nassau Republicans regained their political power in the 1970s by rebuilding their relationship with the building trades unions and incorporating new groups of public sector unionists into the Party. Today, as national politics move increasingly to the right, the history of this alliance broadens our understanding of conditions for the rise of the moderate wing of the Republican Party and allows for an in-depth analysis of how moderate Republicanism was sustained at the local level by its relationship to organized labor.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

My dissertation draws on and extends the scholarly literature in three areas: political machines, the history of the Republican Party; and the relationship between labor and political parties. In this section I discuss each of these areas of research and how my study relates to this earlier scholarship.

### Political Machines

The role of machine politics and their place in civic life is the subject of debate among sociologists, political scientists and historians. Central to these studies are questions about the rise and fall of political machines and who benefitted from them and why. This dissertation explores some of these key questions. Yet it differs from much of the earlier literature because it examines the rise of a moderate Republican political machine in a rural and later, suburban environment over the twentieth century; and it gives greater weight to the role of organized labor, especially the organized building trades in sustaining machine power and politics.

Many scholars locate the high point of the urban political machine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and link the power of political machines to their ties with the flourishing immigrant population in this era. Most of these studies focus on the Democratic Party machine. P. Orman Ray, for example, was among the first to observe that by providing social services and economic security to the millions of needy immigrants who crowded urban centers at the turn of the century, political machines were able to accumulate great power.<sup>7</sup> Others such as Robert Merton, John Bodnar, Alan Lessoff and James J. Connolly, elaborated on his insight.<sup>8</sup> In his study of the Democratic political machine in New Haven Connecticut Robert Dahl builds on Merton's theory. Dahl describes how New Haven's Democratic Party leaders acted as political brokers, dividing up benefits among competing groups, including newly-arrived Italian immigrants. The end result was the creation of a powerful network in support of the Democratic Party. Terry Golway, writing in 2014, comes to a similar conclusion. In his study of New York City's Democratic machine during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he shows how the power of Tammany Hall grew by furnishing patronage jobs in local government to Irish immigrants.<sup>9</sup>

The impact of immigration on the growth of the political machine, while important, misses a good deal of the story. By looking closely at the long life of the Republican Party machine in Nassau County over the course of the twentieth century, this dissertation shows that especially after World War I the relation between organized labor and political machines was at the center of the story. I argue that the Nassau Republican Party's relationship with organized labor was (and perhaps still is) both functional and

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<sup>7</sup> P. Orman Ray, *Political Parties and Practical Politics* (New York: Scribner's, 1913), 339–349.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 132. Merton argues that by providing these services, political machines took the place of local governments, serving a latent social function that was both rational and functional. Bodnar takes a different tack in John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), 202–205. He argues that by offering jobs for votes, political machines supplanted labor unions as a means of upward mobility and minimized class distinction. By tempering economic resentment between the working poor and the wealthy elite, a rigid class system failed to emerge in the United States. Alan Lessoff and James J. Connolly differ with Merton's approach as well. They argue there has been an over-reliance on the functional approach to machine politics and call for a more expansive view of the context in which political brokerage and patronage emerged. Alan Lessoff and James J. Connolly, "From Political Insult to Political Theory: The Boss, the Machine, and the Pluralist Theory," *The Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2013. 139–172.

<sup>9</sup> Terry Golway, *Machine Made: Tammany Hall and the Creation of Modern American Politics* (New York: Liveright Publishing Co., 2014), 161. Golway argues that the inclusion of immigrants brought about a more inclusive civic order.



exploitative. Labor helped build the party into a powerful and long-lasting political machine, and it was the Republican Party's alliance with organized labor that kept it moderate.

This study contrasts with the previous scholarship on political machines by examining a moderate Republican machine in a rural and later suburban environment. In Philadelphia, a Republican machine emerged with ties with organized labor. Yet it was an urban machine situated within an established municipal government from which party leaders could draw jobs and favors.<sup>10</sup> Nassau County's political machine was established in a rural area.

There are only a handful of studies that deal specifically with suburban Republican machines, and these fail to examine moderate Republicanism. One such study is John McLarnon's examination of the McClure machine of Delaware County, Pennsylvania. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the McClure machine remained powerful, ruled by a political boss with an iron fist.<sup>11</sup> Firmly planted in the conservative wing of the party, the Delaware County Republicans were anti-union. The McClure machine never achieved national significance and disappeared by the 1960s.<sup>12</sup>

One of the ways to understand how machine politics worked is to look at how they responded to the New Deal. Harvey Boulay and Alan DiGaetano describe how the Democratic political bosses of major cities such as Memphis, Jersey City, Chicago and New York stayed in power during the 1930s by taking credit for state and federal programs. They contend that New Deal programs did not destroy urban Democratic political machines. Instead, urban machines changed their structure in order to accommodate state and federal programs.<sup>13</sup> In my dissertation, I find a similar response to the New Deal by the Nassau

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<sup>10</sup> Peter McCaffrey, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine 1867-1933* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> John Morrison McLarnon III, *Ruling Suburbia: John J. McClure and the Republican Machine in Delaware County, Pennsylvania* (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 197-198. One of McClure's tactics for maintaining loyalty was to circulate "removal lists" among patronage workers who failed to contribute to the party.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 127-128.

<sup>13</sup> Harvey Boulay and Alan DiGaetano, "Why Did Political Machines Disappear?" *Journal of Urban History* Vol 12, no.1 (November 1985): 33. There is a great deal of discussion over whether or not the social welfare programs of the New Deal led to the demise of the bosses and the political machine. In Nassau County, Sprague rose to power on the wave of social welfare programs provided by the New Deal.

County Republican political machine.<sup>14</sup> Nassau County Republicans adopted many of the New Deal programs and made them their own.

Yet Nassau County Republicans also sustained their power for decades after the 1930s. How their response to the New Deal differed from that of Fiorella LaGuardia, the Republican mayor of New York City, and their different relationship to political machines helps explain their longevity. Alyn Brodsky's study shows that LaGuardia embraced New Deal programs, but he rarely challenged federal and state Democratic administrators.<sup>15</sup> LaGuardia was not a party regular and was not part of a political machine. He was elected on a Fusion ticket with the support of major and minor political parties. His success was a result of his political savvy and expansive personality. After he left office, there was no political structure to serve as a lasting legacy.<sup>16</sup> This was certainly not the case in Nassau County where the political machine survived long past any of its leaders. Like LaGuardia, J. Russel Sprague, the leader of the Nassau County Republican Party from the 1930s to the early 1960s, adopted New Deal programs. But he also took great care to sustain his organizational ties with the labor movement and modernize the Nassau County political machine.

Earlier scholars have explored the reasons for the unusual power of Nassau County Republicans. I draw on and extend their work. Salvatore LaGumina, for example, shows that during the early twentieth century, Nassau County Republicans erected the framework of support necessary for a political machine by exchanging votes for jobs within the Italian immigrant community.<sup>17</sup> The work of social scientists Christopher Ansell and Arthur Burris with their emphasis on organized labor informs this dissertation as well. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the AFL consolidated craft unions into city-wide federations. Ansell and Burris argue that it was consolidation of the labor movement that played an

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<sup>14</sup> My assessment agrees also with Lorraine Lupinski-Huvane and Alan Singer. See Lupinski-Huvane and Singer. "The Great Depression and the New Deal on Long Island," *Magazine of History* Vol.16, no.1, The Great Depression (Fall 2001): 26–29.

<sup>15</sup> Alyn Brodsky, *The Great Mayor: Fiorella LaGuardia and the Making of the City of New York* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 159, 251, 327. Democrats praised LaGuardia for the way he administered New Deal programs, including President Roosevelt and the national WPA administrator, Harry Hopkins.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 480.

<sup>17</sup> Salvatore LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburbs: Long island Italians* (Staten Island, New York: the Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1988), 188.

integral role in the emergence of the urban political machine. Because labor spoke with one voice, local politicians were able to accommodate the craft unions and, in the process, build the party's influence and power. I find this literature on the pre-New Deal period persuasive and extend it into the New Deal and beyond.<sup>18</sup>

Nassau Republicans achieved power nationally as well as locally. In explaining their prominence, scholars typically point to the leadership of J. Russell Sprague. In her dissertation, Marjorie Harrison, for example, argues that key to Sprague's power was his use of patronage and local government services in exchange for political support.<sup>19</sup> In his study of Nassau County politics, James Shelland argues that as County Executive, Sprague had wide discretion to make political appointments, dole out jobs for patronage and control county contracts with vendors.<sup>20</sup> I build on these studies and find Sprague a key figure. Yet, I find Sprague's partners in organized labor, specifically William DeKoning of the AFL Building Trades, and the alliance they built of equal significance.

But how are we to understand the continuing power of the Nassau County Republicans in the 1960s and afterwards? A handful of scholars have noted that Nassau Republicans faced challenges in the postwar era with the rise of a more diverse population and a new labor movement sympathetic to the Democratic Party.<sup>21</sup> I deepen their analysis and continue the story into the 1970s and 1980s, detailing the

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<sup>18</sup> Christopher K. Ansell and Arthur L. Burris, "Bosses of the city Unite! Labor Politics and Political Machine Consolidation, 1870-1910," *Studies in American Political Development*, 11, (Spring 1997) 1-43; Dennis Ippolito, "Political Perspectives of Suburban Party Leaders," *Social Science Quarterly* 49, (March 1967): 800-815. Ippolito examines the political activities of the Nassau County Republicans and Democrats during the 1950s and the 1960s, a period during which the Democrats were able to mount a challenge to the Republican's control of the county. He considers the similarities and the differences in their organizational structures, party leadership, voter turnout, and the impact of ideology to motivate the support of the voters. Ippolito contends that political change came about in Nassau County as the result of the growing diversity of the population that accompanied the post-World War Two suburban explosion.

<sup>19</sup> Marjorie Freeman Harrison, "Machine Politics Suburban Style: J. Russell Sprague and the Nassau County (N.Y.) Republican Party at Midcentury" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> James C. Shelland, "The County Executive: A Case Study of the Office in Nassau County, New York" (PhD. diss., New School for Social Research, 1975), 88.

<sup>21</sup> In his dissertation, Herbert Rosenbaum looks at voter turnout in Nassau County over the span of several decades. He shows how the Nassau County Republican machine held onto power despite state and national Democratic trends. According to Rosenbaum, Republican strength begins to ebb with the increase in the number of people moving to Nassau County from New York City. They brought with them an ethnic and religious diversity as well as favorable dispositions towards labor that helped erode Republican control of the county. Herbert David Rosenbaum, "The Political Consequences of Suburban Growth: A Case Study of Nassau County, New York," (PhD. diss., Columbia University, 1967), 30, 99-101.

ways in which moderate Republicans regained their political advantages by reaching out to public sector unionists and forging ties with DeKoning's son and other leaders of the building trade's.

### The Republican Party

Much of the literature about the Republican Party relates to its evolution as a national party, with the focus of recent studies on the rise of the conservative wing of the party, its leaders, and its impact on national politics. David Farber explains the recent rise of conservatism by examining the political views of national leaders within the right wing of the Republican Party from the 1930s to 2008.<sup>22</sup> In her study, Lisa McGirr turns her focus to the rise of conservatism on the local level. McGirr examines the conditions under which the suburbanites of Orange County, California spawned a national movement of right-wing Republican conservatism.<sup>23</sup> Both McGirr and Darren Dochuk examine the years following World War II, when migrants from the south and Midwest came to work in the growing defense industry, settling in the emerging suburban communities of southern California.<sup>24</sup> There, these migrants joined a growing movement of evangelicals, fundamentalists and individualists to form what would become a right-wing movement.

In Nassau County, however, there were far different results. Even as Nassau County suburbanized following World War II and attracted millions of workers to its burgeoning defense plants, it remained moderate politically. This dissertation shows how a new postwar alliance of defense-related labor unions sustained Nassau Republicans and kept them firmly in the moderate wing of the party. Indeed, Nassau Republicans maintained a transactional relationship with the building trades and new groups of public sector unionists that reinforced a moderate political orientation into the twenty-first century.

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<sup>22</sup> David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 2010), 96-97.

<sup>23</sup> Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New Right* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 43, 129-131.

<sup>24</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain Folk, Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

Heather Cox-Richardson's history of the Republican Party is a refreshing exception to the single focus on the rise of the right. She explains that during the late nineteenth century, Republicans became divided into conservative and moderate wings and that Theodore Roosevelt emerged as a leader of the moderate wing. A major distinguishing feature of Roosevelt's moderate outlook, she argues, was his support of workers' rights. In addition, Cox-Richardson shows how Thomas E. Dewey carried moderate Republicanism into midcentury with the support of organized labor.<sup>25</sup> Other studies, too, point in directions similar to those of Cox-Richardson.<sup>26</sup> In his biographies of Thomas Dewey and Nelson Rockefeller, for example, Richard Norton Smith asserts that both Dewey and Rockefeller separated their politics from the conservative wing of the Republican Party by appealing to organized labor.<sup>27</sup>

Nassau County was home to the moderate wing of the Republican Party for almost a century. This dissertation examines the local working people and organizations who supported moderate Republicanism and seeks to understand what they gained from their ties to the Republican Party. It finds organized labor crucial to Republican moderate politics at the local and state level and suggests that whatever happened at the state and local levels must be part of the national story of the Republican Party.

### Labor and Politics

Much of the scholarship on the relationship between political parties and organized labor examines the ties between unions and the Democratic Party. In his study of Democratic congressional and presidential politics from the 1960s to the 1990s, Taylor Dark describes labor as an organized constituency within the Democratic Party.<sup>28</sup> According to Nelson Lichtenstein, national labor unions

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<sup>25</sup> Heather Cox-Richardson, *To Make Men Free: A History of the Republican Party* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 139-170.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas McCue, "Thomas E. Dewey and the Politics of Accommodation, 1940-1952" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1979), 172. McCue examines moderate Republicanism on a national level and events in Nassau County look to define moderate Republicanism. He describes Dewey's moderate Republicanism as the "politics of accommodation." McCue argues that Dewey's support conflicted with the GOP's right wing. In 1947, Dewey attempted to play down his support of these two issues. To prove his point, as governor of New York, he supported the passage of the Condon-Wadlin Act that called for harsh penalties for strikes by public employees.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Norton Smith, *Thomas E. Dewey and His Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 163-164, 472-475; Richard Norton Smith, *On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller* (New York: Random House, 2014), 131.

<sup>28</sup> Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 71, 79. Dark argues that outside of the building trades, unions served as an "organized constituency" within the Democratic

developed into a voting bloc in the Democratic Party.<sup>29</sup> Alternatively, my dissertation looks at the relationship between organized labor, specifically the building trades and public sector unions, and the Republican Party.

The subject of organized labor and moderate Republicanism has received scant scholarly treatment. Yet, there are several historical studies that inform my work. In her history of the building trades unions, Grace Palladino, for example, reveals that because the construction trades were dependent on locally funded contracts, it was necessary for them to align with the local political party, regardless of whether Democrats or Republican were in charge. This dependence was especially the case where there were political machines.<sup>30</sup> It was certainly true in Nassau County, where the Republican Party controlled county construction.

Often historians miss the crucial role of the AFL unions in politics because the scholarly consensus remains that the AFL focused almost exclusively on economic questions, eschewed the social and political realm, and practiced “pure and simple” or apolitical unionism after the 1890s. However, some historians have qualified that portrait. Julie Greene, for example, in her study, *Pure and Simple Politics*, shows that the AFL involved itself in local and national politics in the twentieth century. In her view, however, its political program was narrow and reformist.<sup>31</sup> In “Pure and Simple Radicalism,” Dorothy Sue Cobble extends Greene’s arguments. She notes that AFL unions, which included the building trades, expended significant energy in national and local politics in the early twentieth century and lobbied extensively for workers’ right to living wages, shorter hours and political freedoms such as

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Party. He ties the moderate and conservative wings of the Republican Party as an outgrowth of regional politics, with conservatives centered in the south and the west, and moderates in the north and the northeast. Because construction unions are dependent on local government for the funding of construction projects, they must, by necessity, align with urban who run local political machines. However, Dark maintains that the early AFL unions subscribed to the “myth of non-partisanship” and were actually more conservative than they admitted.

<sup>29</sup> Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 182, 261. Lichtenstein recognizes that by 1980 fully forty percent of union members voted Republican. By the early twenty-first century, Lichtenstein points out that with the rise of public sector unions in New York State, organized labor learned to bargain with both political parties.

<sup>30</sup> Grace Palladino, *Skilled Hands, Strong Spirits: A Century of Building Trades History* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2005), 50-51. The mistrust between the trades flowed upward to the national organizations, making it even more difficult Gompers to coordinate a national labor movement.

<sup>31</sup> Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881–1917* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 46-47, 138.

assembly and free speech. In the New Deal, the AFL eventually followed the CIO and established political action committees that worked with both the Democratic and the Republican Party.<sup>32</sup>

Biographical portraits of key moderate Republican leaders have proven useful in thinking about the relationship between organized labor and politics. In *Theodore Roosevelt and Labor: 1900–1918*, Irving Greenberg explains that Roosevelt’s support for unions contributed to his views as a moderate Republican. Roosevelt’s support for organized labor was not unequivocal; it was sometimes affected by his personal relationships. For example, he supported the leader of the mineworkers union, John Mitchell, while often locking horns with Samuel Gompers, the founder and the leader of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Greenberg makes clear that while Roosevelt was often opposed to labor’s involvement in politics when union leaders supported Democrats, he eagerly sought labor support for Republicans.<sup>33</sup> In his biographies of Thomas Dewey and Nelson Rockefeller, Richard Norton Smith shows how support for organized labor was fundamental to both men. Dewey and Rockefeller followed in the tradition of Roosevelt’s moderate Republicanism and eagerly sought the support of organized labor. As candidates both men simultaneously courted the leaders of the Nassau County Republican Party and the Nassau County labor movement.<sup>34</sup>

This dissertation acknowledges these studies, especially those noting the close ties between their subjects and organized workers. At the same time, it shifts the focus to the local level and to the relation between local politicians and labor leaders.<sup>35</sup> By studying Nassau County, we enhance our understanding of the rise of the conservative wing and why US politics turned to the right.

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<sup>32</sup> Dorothy Sue Cobble. “Pure and Simple Radicalism: Putting the Progressive Era AFL in Its Time.” *Labor Studies in Working-Class History*. Vol.10, Winter 2013, 10(4):61–87.

<sup>33</sup> Irving Greenberg, *Theodore Roosevelt and Labor: 1900–1918* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 454.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Thomas E. Dewey*, 163–164; Smith, *On His Own Terms: A Life of Nelson Rockefeller* (New York: Random House, 2014), 131.

<sup>35</sup> In his dissertation, Herbert Rosenbaum looks at voter turnout in Nassau County over the span of several decades. He shows how the Nassau County Republican machine held onto power despite state and national Democratic trends. According to Rosenbaum, Republican strength begins to ebb with the increase in the number of people moving to Nassau County from New York City. They brought with them an ethnic and religious diversity as well as favorable dispositions towards labor that helped erode Republican control of the county. Dennis Ippolito examines the political activities of the Nassau County Republicans and Democrats during the 1950s and the 1960s, a period during which the Democrats were able to mount a challenge to the Republican’s control of the county. Ippolito considers the similarities and the differences in their organizational structures, party leadership, voter turnout, and the impact of ideology to motivate the support of the voters. Ippolito contends that political

### Sources and Records

There are few primary sources regarding organized labor in Nassau County. Even though the Long Island Federation of Labor was established in 1959, the bulk of the organization's files prior to 2004 have disappeared. It may be that some of the files disappeared during the 1990's when one of the Federation's former presidents, Anthony Amodeo, was forced to resign. However, I have been fortunate to have access to the few records that remain.

In addition, Lurana Campanaro, the widow of Rocco Campanaro, one of the founding members and first executive secretary of the Long Island Federation of Labor, generously provided me with her husband's large and extensive collection of newspaper clippings, photos, and letters. These files include the Federation's first convention booklets, pamphlets, letters and other source material, all of which I used in writing this dissertation.

I also interviewed twenty-four labor leaders, activists, elected officials, and politicians who provided a perspective on Nassau County's history not available in other sources. Some of these interviews extended over a long period of time. Mrs. Campanaro, for example, was active in Nassau County politics beginning her career in the 1960s, and remained active until her husband's retirement. During this period, she was well acquainted with many of the leaders in the Democratic and Republican Party and organized labor. I met with Mrs. Campanaro for several days over a two-month period during which she shared with me her recollections. I also interviewed labor leaders like Justin Ostro. Ostro was the president of a Machinists union local in Nassau County during the 1950s and 1960s. Not only was he a union leader, but he was also an activist in the Democratic Party. I interviewed him over the phone and then followed up with an extensive email exchange.

I identified my first interview subjects through my past work as a political organizer for 1199SEIU on Long Island and as the political director for the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store

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change came about in Nassau County as the result of the growing diversity of the population that accompanied the post-World War Two suburban explosion.



Union (RWDSU). Another helpful source was my husband, Roger Clayman, the executive director of the Long Island Federation of Labor, who introduced me to several of the people I interviewed for this study.

Each of the interviews began with a list of basic questions regarding political affiliation, how and why they registered to vote with a particular political party, and their positions within the union. I asked questions about the political background and union involvement of their parents. I conducted the interviews in an informal manner and encouraged participants to talk about their memories and other subjects as they arose. What I wanted to hear were their stories, both personal and political. Each interview was conducted over several hours; some subjects were interviewed on more than one occasion. The amount of time varied with each interview subject. There were several politicians and union activists who shared stories but would not allow their names or identifying information to be used. I cite them in the dissertation as ANON with the date of the interview.

There is one area of primary source material that I found rich in information: newspapers and newsletters. Events surrounding the activities of the Long Island labor movement appeared in *Shop News*, an IUE shop floor publication; the IUE newspaper, *The Scanner*; and *The Projector*, a newsletter published briefly during the mid-1960s by the Long Island Federation of Labor. Although New York City newspapers generally ignored Long Island, the many weekly newspapers that covered Long Island at the time offered much. The island's population was small at the turn of the century; and while there were no daily newspapers that covered the news of the entire island, there were several daily and weekly newspapers that covered specific areas or communities. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, a daily paper that lasted from 1841 to 1955, occasionally covered Nassau County.<sup>36</sup> Starting in 1940, *Newsday* began publication as a daily newspaper. Its coverage extended over the entire island. Another newspaper at the time was the *Long Island Press*.

While there may be some truth that “journalism is the first draft of history,” newspapers are not always reliable purveyors of information. Newspaper stories are often written with a bias, particularly

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<sup>36</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.bklynlibrary.org/brooklyn-collection/history-brooklyn-daily-eagle>.

stories about local actors on the political stage. The problem of bias became particularly evident during my research on William DeKoning. While DeKoning was certainly a rough character, *Newsday's* coverage of him in the 1950s reeked of class bias, written in the style of Westbrook Pegler, a popular columnist at the time whose articles about organized labor and their leaders were filled with haughty disdain.<sup>37</sup> But even in the more mainstream press, where objectivity was supposed to be the standard, DeKoning was cast as a rough-hewn street thug with few positive qualities. Robert Keeler, a former reporter who wrote a history of *Newsday*, described how the paper's publisher, Alicia Patterson, would sometimes "go after" someone she didn't like. When I spoke to Keeler, he reiterated that Patterson and *Newsday's* editor, Alan Hathway, did not like William DeKoning.<sup>38</sup>

Another source of bias for local newspapers was their dependency on the revenues generated by government's need for legal notices and ads. To make sure that the revenues continued to flow towards their newspapers, publishers and editors generally maintained a friendly relationship with local politicians. Marjorie Harrison, for example, points out that much of the good press that J. Russel Sprague received was because he had a strong relationship with the publisher of the *Nassau Daily Review*.<sup>39</sup> Newspaper coverage of labor often reflected the political perspective of individual reporters as well as the paper's political leanings. Austin Perlow, a reporter at the *Press* who covered Long Island labor during the 1960s, wrote favorably about labor because, as those who knew him recollected, Perlow was sympathetic to organized labor.<sup>40</sup>

### Chapter Descriptions

The dissertation proceeds chronologically and covers the rise of moderate Republicanism on Nassau County from the 1890s to the present. In Chapter One, I describe Nassau County society and politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During the late nineteenth century, wealthy

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<sup>37</sup> David Witwer, *The Shadow of a Racketeer: Scandal in Organized Labor* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Robert F. Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History of a Respectable Tabloid* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), 196, 206. Keeler writes that one of the reporters went after DeKoning because a failed financial transaction.

<sup>39</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 43.

<sup>40</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview with author. Aug. 26, 2014.

landowners and local politicians formed a coalition for the purpose of incorporating Nassau County. Among these landowners was Theodore Roosevelt, whose moderate Republicanism would permanently stamp the direction of Nassau County politics. G. Wilbur Doughty emerged as the county Republican leader. As a moderate, he recruited from among the growing number of local government workers and the rising Italian immigrant population to establish the foundation of Nassau County's political machine.

Chapter Two picks up the story after Doughty's death in 1930 when his nephew J. Russel Sprague becomes County Chairman. As the Depression sweeps Democrats into office, Nassau County remains in the Republican camp. I show how Sprague consolidated his power during the New Deal by adopting New Deal reform programs, using political patronage, and allying with AFL building trades leader William DeKoning in his successful region wide campaign demanding Democrats raise construction workers wages on Works Progress Administration sites. Sprague's rise within the state and national Republican Party and his influence on presidential aspirant Thomas E. Dewey, I argue, rested on his alliance with organized labor.

In Chapter Three I show how the alliance between organized labor and the Republican Party survived the challenge of wartime expansion and the incursion of CIO organizers. Unions affiliated with the CIO went beyond the bread-and-butter issues of the AFL and advocated for workers' rights and progressive social causes. They organized defense workers and established a significant presence in Nassau County. In response, AFL Building Trades leader DeKoning made an unusual choice. He recruited CIO leaders to battle conservative local Congressman Leonard Hall of Oyster Bay. The anti-Hall labor coalition defused challenges to DeKoning's leadership by the CIO unions. It also helped to increase Sprague's power in the Republican Party and solidify the alliance between organized labor and the Republicans. DeKoning used his position as a spokesman for organized labor to do Sprague's bidding and endorsed Republican candidates who Sprague recommended.

Chapter Four describes the increasing power and then the fall of DeKoning and Sprague. Yet despite the loss of power of these two leaders, the labor-republican alliance persists. Nassau County's post-war suburban expansion helped catapult DeKoning and Sprague to new heights of power. But when

DeKoning instructed members of his local to cross a picket line, he was turned out of the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council, opening the door for new labor leadership. J. Russel Sprague fell from power too: he was caught up in a stock scandal and forced to resign from the Republican National Committee. His resignation began the steady, slow erosion of moderate Nassau County on national politics.

Chapter Five describes the growing Democratic challenge to the power of Nassau County republicans in the 1950s, culminating in the election of Eugene Nickerson as the first Democratic County Executive in 1961. Throughout the 1950's, the AFL and CIO defense industry unions added thousands of members and continuously agitated for better wages and working conditions. Its leaders were mostly Democrats from New York City, and their main objective was to increase the influence of labor on the politics of Nassau County. By 1959, they dominated organized labor in Nassau County, and established the Long Island Federation of Labor (LIFED). Soon after, they joined with the leaders of the Democratic Party and ousted the Republicans in 1961.

Chapter Six shows how during the 1960s, the Democrats squandered their victory and how the Republicans begin to work their way back to control of the county. The 1964 Democratic sweep of the county was premised in part on the Democratic promise to protect jobs in the defense industry. When those promises were broken and jobs disappeared, defense industry unionism declined. Without partners in organized labor, the hold of Nassau County Democrats on the county unraveled. They had neglected to build a patronage machine, and national issues like civil rights, the women's movement and the Vietnam War divided them. In addition, they failed to recognize the significance of the passage of the 1967 Taylor Act granting collective bargaining rights to public employees. The Republicans took advantage of the Democrat's weaknesses. They supported the unionization of local government workers, and reestablished their relationship with the Long Island Federation of Labor.

In Chapter Seven, I show how the Nassau Republicans regained and solidified their power after 1968. The preoccupation of the Democrats with national politics had led them to overlook the rising public sector unions but the Republicans built ties to the powerful Civil Service Employees Unions. Changes occurred in the Long Island Federation of Labor as well, and as new leaders emerged, supported by the

building trades, the Republicans gain other allies. By the 1970 elections, the Democrats were divided and demoralized and Republicans take back the county. The new county chairman, Joe Margiotta, linked the party with the public sector unions and the building trades, re-creating a powerful political machine premised on a labor-friendly, moderate Republicanism that endured into the 1980s and beyond.

## *Chapter One*

### *Barons and Baymen: The Roots of Moderate Republicanism in Nassau County*

It was a brisk morning when Colonel Theodore Roosevelt and a handful of local and state politicians boarded a two-car train in Long Island City in Queens County. It was November 2, 1898, and Roosevelt was running for governor of New York. The plan was for the train to make eighteen stops at stations across Long Island so that candidate Roosevelt could speak to voters. From the border with New York City to its longest point, Long Island is one hundred eighteen miles long. On the eastern half of the island was Suffolk County, incorporated in 1683, but between Suffolk County and New York, was a vast unincorporated area with three towns: Hempstead, North Hempstead, and Oyster Bay. Like the rest of Long Island, the people living there were primarily baymen and farmers, fishing the waters, planting potatoes and raising ducks.

Each town had been alerted about the colonel's visit. For some communities, it was a holiday. Parades and marching bands greeted the men riding gaily decorated trains festooned with patriotic bunting. It had been fifty years since any candidate running for high office had made such a journey across the island. Roosevelt was one of the wealthy men who had built a mansion on the island's north shore, but he was considered a native son. At each stop, Roosevelt had the same message, warning voters against the possible incursion of New York City Democrats and the nefarious Tammany Hall political machine on the good people of Long Island.<sup>1</sup>

Under the leadership of Theodore Roosevelt, moderate Republicanism rose in Nassau County during the Progressive Era and the 1920s. Wealthy landowners and local politicians formed a coalition to pursue county incorporation at the turn of the century building a political machine in Nassau County that soon became the center of moderate Republicanism, a distinction that would endure into the next century and beyond.<sup>2</sup> Following county incorporation a local oyster farmer named G. Wilbur Doughty began to

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<sup>1</sup> "Colonel Roosevelt's Long Island Tour," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov 2, 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Mohan, "Nassau's Difficult Birth," in *Long Island: Our Story*, Newsday Staff (Melville, NY: Newsday, 1998). 232,233.

lay the foundation for a Republican political organization. He recruited members to the Republican Party by using county control of road-building funds to exchange construction jobs for votes. By reaching out to the immigrant community and later to organized labor, Doughty built a base loyal to the Republican Party.

By the 1920s, construction work became the primary occupation in Nassau County, putting Doughty in control of a large and powerful political operation.<sup>3</sup> During the 1920s, Robert Moses arrived in Nassau County and embarked on a series of vast building projects. More workers were hired, including Italian immigrants, who Doughty recruited as part of his patronage machine.

The projects soon attracted the attention of Joe Fay, a business agent with the Operating Engineers union in New Jersey. Fay sent a trusted lieutenant, William DeKoning, to Nassau County to unionize construction workers.<sup>4</sup> A partnership between DeKoning and Nassau County Republicans was born. It would survive G. Wilbur Doughty's sudden death in 1930.

### Incorporation

During the nineteenth century, there were several attempts to establish a western county by Long Islanders; but with little political power and no support from the state capitol in Albany, every effort ended in failure. The Democrats of New York City didn't want their upstart neighbor to have any political power, and they continuously blocked their efforts leading to resentment and suspicion towards New York City among Long Islanders. This animosity was nothing new. There was a "consistent negativism" on Long Island directed towards Queens and New York City that could be seen in the election returns dating back to 1860.<sup>5</sup> In the major population areas of Hempstead and North Hempstead, voters consistently voted Republican, while the rest of Queens County, New York, and Brooklyn remained solidly Democratic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Edward J. Smits, *Nassau Suburbia, USA: The First Seventy-Five Years of Nassau County, New York, 1899 to 1974* (New York: Doubleday, 1974) 185.

<sup>4</sup> "Benevolent Bill: Barrooms for His Boys," *Newsday*, May 16, 1950.

<sup>5</sup> Edward J. Smits, "The Creation of Nassau County," *Long Island Historical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (Spring, 1989). 180.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey A. Kroessler, "The Greater City and Queens County," *Long Island Historical Journal* Vol. 11, No. 1 (Fall, 1998):10.

Nassau County's eastern border was clearly defined.<sup>7</sup> But its western border had was vague. There were three townships, each governed by a town supervisor, but those were loosely structured. The Board of Supervisors had no permanent meeting place but met at taverns across the county.<sup>8</sup> Among Long Islanders, the absence of a cohesive government further stimulated distrust of their western neighbors.<sup>9</sup> The ambiguity of the Queens border and the absence of a distinct government structure provided reason enough for Long Islanders to advocate for their own county government.

At the end of the nineteenth century, several factors emerged which led to the successful establishment of the county. The nation's wealthy elite began building vast estates, primarily on Long Island's North Shore, with seclusion *and* exclusion in mind. With undisturbed woodlands and rolling hills, Long Island was a refuge from the clatter and crowd of the city just a few miles to the west. The area soon grew very popular with the upper classes, and became known as the "Gold Coast."<sup>10</sup>

Property owners in the area went to great lengths to keep the masses off of their land, surrounding their acreage with thick walls and private security guards. To keep the public from visiting nearby beaches, they illegally blocked public access roads. The roads on and around their properties were marked for their own use and convenience, and the general public was not welcome.<sup>11</sup>

At first, the absence of a county government was an advantage to the estate owners. Their mansions were built outside of the town's borders in unincorporated areas, so there were no local authorities or pesky zoning laws to contend with, allowing them to do as they pleased. This changed when in January 1898, the five boroughs of Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Manhattan and the Bronx were consolidated into Greater New York City. The *New York Times* lauded consolidation, and declared that

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<sup>7</sup> Accessed from: <http://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/Departments/CountyExecutive/HistoryofSuffolkCounty.aspx>; Oscar Darlington, *Glimpses of Nassau County's History* (Mineola, New York: Nassau County Trust Company, 1949), 6–7.

<sup>8</sup> Kroessler, "The Greater City, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Smits, "The Creation of Nassau County," 176.

<sup>10</sup> Long Island attracted wealthy men from all over the country and the world. Residents included Walter Chrysler, Marshall Field, and King Zog from Albania. Paul J. Mateyunas, *North Shore Long Island Country Houses 1890–1950* (New York: Acanthus Press, 2007). Of the captains of finance and industry profiled by B.C. Forbes in his 1917 best-seller, *Men Who Are Making America*, almost half either resided on Long Island for part of the year or had children who maintained country houses east of the city line. Robert B. MacKay, "Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects: 1860–1940," *Long Island Historical Journal* Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring, 1994): 168; Dennis Sobin, *Dynamics of Community Change: The Case of Long Island's Declining Gold Coast* (Port Washington, NY: Ira J. Friedman, 1965), 34–37.

<sup>11</sup> Sobin, *Dynamics of Community Change*, 98.



future improvements in transportation would allow city-dwellers to move from the over-crowded tenements across the East River to the Long Island section.<sup>12</sup>

The prospect of hordes of New Yorkers overrunning the countryside alarmed Long Islanders. For the inhabitants of the area east of the city, the threat of the annexation of Nassau County by New York City suddenly became a grim possibility.<sup>13</sup> They were notoriously provincial and wary of outsiders. Robert Caro cites how the baymen of Long Island, the men who made their living fishing, clamming, and crabbing the bays, had historically “hated” the city and distrusted anyone who was “from away,” that is, not a Long Islander.<sup>14</sup> They especially distrusted “foreigners,” and reserved a special enmity towards New York City and its domination by the corrupt Tammany Democratic machine.<sup>15</sup> It was the “unwelcome prospect of the Tammany machine, combined with fears that the growing urban population would dominate county politics,” that stirred the citizens of Hempstead, North Hempstead, and Oyster Bay to work towards establishing a county separate from New York City.<sup>16</sup>

During the planning to create Greater New York City, an important development occurred that would impact the formation of Nassau County and contribute to the development of its politics. Those drawing the city maps included only one quarter of Queens County as part of Greater New York City. Excluded were the eastern towns of Queens County on Long Island: Hempstead, North Hempstead, and Oyster Bay.<sup>17</sup> They reasoned that these communities were too small to provide significant tax revenues

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<sup>12</sup> “Greater New York’s Bright Prospects: Scope and Character of the New Charter as Reflected by Public Opinion Throughout the Proposed City,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1896.

<sup>13</sup> “The New City Ushered In: Big Parade and Brilliant Display,” *New York Times*, Jan 1, 1898.

<sup>14</sup> Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen, *Picture Windows: How The Suburbs Happened* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 9. By 1898, after the consolidation of New York City, the “countrymen’s dread of the city was almost a complex among the deep-rooted people” of Hempstead, Oyster Bay, and North Hempstead. Darlington, *Glimpses of Nassau County’s History*, 7; Mateyunas, *North Shore*, 14. Contact with the outside world was more likely to be with fellow seamen from southern New England, rather than New York City. Elly Shodell, ed., *Particles of the Past: Sandmining on Long Island 1870s–1980s* (Port Washington, NY: Port Washington Public Library, 1985), 8; Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 147.

<sup>15</sup> Golway, *Machine Made*, 252.

<sup>16</sup> Kroessler, “The Greater City and Queens County,” 9.

<sup>17</sup> “Greater New York’s Bright Prospects,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1896. The articles list the benefits of a Greater New York consolidation. They argued that consolidation would be “without friction” and dismiss any possible resistance because city dwellers “have a better understanding of the requirements of a complete government and the cost of maintaining governmental machinery” than those in outlying unincorporated areas, whose municipal “experience is limited to an inexpensive Board of Town Trustees and an occasional burst of extravagance for road making.” One of their arguments was that statutory restrictions on bonded indebtedness would allow for increased borrowing necessary for improvements to the infrastructure. A Greater New York could tax more and float more bonds. Brooklyn had already reached its debt limits.

but large enough to demand city services, a cost that they wanted to avoid. Leaving the towns out of Greater New York put them “in the peculiar position of being part of a county that was half in and half out of the new metropolis.”<sup>18</sup>

For those living on Long Island, the omission was fortuitous. Following the consolidation of New York City, the wealthy owners of the north shore mansions joined with local residents to pass the enabling legislation in the state legislature to establish a county separate from New York City. Among the North Shore residents were influential Republicans, including Theodore Roosevelt who was elected Governor of New York in 1898.<sup>19</sup> As a homeowner in western Long Island, it was in his own interest to incorporate the western portion of Long Island as a separate county.

G. Wilbur Doughty was a member of the State Assembly who represented the area of Long Island that was partly in Queens. He had been involved in a previous effort to separate western Long Island from Queens County that failed. Doughty helped form a coalition with Roosevelt and the rich men of the north shore and soon emerged as a local leader. In the spring of 1898, his bill, what the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* called “Doughty’s bill” to incorporate Nassau County, was passed by the state legislature.<sup>20</sup> It was one year to the day after Greater New York City was created, that Nassau County was born on January 1, 1899.<sup>21</sup>

At the first meeting of the Nassau County Board of Supervisors, Queens County leaders sent a telegram congratulating Long Islanders for “escaping the snares of the expanding city.”<sup>22</sup> Their relationship quickly deteriorated when four months later, the ambiguity of the boundary line between Nassau County and New York City became an issue. G. Wilbur Doughty took advantage of this

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<sup>18</sup> Kroessler, “The Greater City and Queens County,” 7. The border line that was drawn to create Queens County went from Little Neck Bay on the north shore of Long Island to Jamaica Bay on the south shore. Smits, “The Creation of Nassau County,” 176. There are two reasons for the manner in which New York City’s border was drawn. Firstly, it “reflected the influence of the chamber of Commerce and its desire for control and development of the harbor.” Second, “these rural sections apparently had few assets to offer the city—they were thought of as a burden that would require excessive spending.”

<sup>19</sup> Many of the North Shore residents were influential Republicans who contributed heavily to the party. Caro, *The Power Broker*, 152; “Col. Roosevelt Wins,” *New York Times*, Nov 9, 1898.

<sup>20</sup> Kroessler, *The Greater City*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> “Doughty’s Bill Signed,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 21, 1899.

<sup>22</sup> Accessed from: [http://www.nassaucountyny.gov/website/en/facts\\_stats\\_maps/history\\_of\\_NC.html](http://www.nassaucountyny.gov/website/en/facts_stats_maps/history_of_NC.html). The leaders of Queens County were sympathetic to the new county. Darlington, *Glimpses of Nassau County’s History*, 10.

discrepancy and proposed an amendment to the Nassau County bill that called for moving the Queens County border to the west, placing the community of Inwood and the Village of Lawrence, which Doughty happened to represent, within Nassau County.<sup>23</sup>

Doughty's amendment passed, and when the legislative session ended in Albany, he arrived home at the Lawrence railroad station where two thousand joyful Long Islanders gave him a hero's welcome. They paraded through the town and afterwards feted Doughty with a dinner in his honor. As a further token of gratitude, they presented him with a diamond pin and thanked him for "getting them out of entanglements" with New York City."<sup>24</sup> The events in Inwood, "noted for its oysters and political ardor," revealed the depth of the disdain residents had for the "Tammany Tiger." Their paranoia over what they viewed as possible Tammany connections was so intense that local candidates ran under banners like the "Citizen's Party" rather than be associated with the Democratic Party.<sup>25</sup>

Changing boundaries, however, could not restrain city dwellers from moving east. The consolidation of New York City led to increased borrowing which were used to fund improvements to the city's infrastructure. One of the first projects to be completed was the 1909 Queensboro Bridge, linking Manhattan with Queens.<sup>26</sup> A year later, the East River tunnel was built, providing direct access to Long Island from Manhattan via the Long Island Railroad, giving over-crowded city residents an incentive to move east.<sup>27</sup> Between 1905 and 1911, the population of Nassau County rose by one third while the number of commuters on the railroad between Nassau County and New York City doubled.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Doughty's Bill Signed," April 21, 1899.

<sup>24</sup> "Inwood Honors Doughty," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 1, 1899. Following Doughty's success, residents of Rockaway and Far Rockaway began to gather signatures to break away from New York City and join Nassau County. Facing opposition from Tammany Hall and the threat of a veto from the mayor of New York City, their efforts failed. For several years, Rockaway and Far Rockaway residents tried to break away, only to be confronted by the continuing opposition of Tammany and later still by the Nassau County Board of Supervisors. Also see "Want To Get Out Of New York," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Feb 17, 1900; "Indignant Taxpayers," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov 1, 1902.

<sup>25</sup> Smits. "The Creation of Nassau County," 24.

<sup>26</sup> "The New Long Island As a Place of Residence," *New York Times*, Sept 4, 1910. The article predicted that with the opening of the Queensboro Bridge (1909) and the Pennsylvania RR tunnel (1910), Long Island would experience a tremendous growth in population. There was a one hundred percent increase in commuter riders between 1904 and 1910 on the Long Island Railroad.

<sup>27</sup> Mateyunas, *North Shore*, 14; Darlington, *Glimpses of Nassau County's History*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> In 1890, the area now known as Nassau County had a population of 45,760. Suffolk County had a population of 62,491. Barbara Shupe, ed., *Population of Long Island Communities 1790–1980: Decennial Census Data, August 1982* (Hauppauge, New York: Long Island Regional Planning Board, 1982) 15–17; LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburb*, 11; Mateyunas, *North Shore*, 16–17; Sobin, *Dynamics of Community Change*, 44; Bernie Bookbinder, *Long Island: People and Places, Past and Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1998), 177–200. From 1900 to 1910, the population of Nassau County grew from

There was a rising suspicion that many of the new residents moving to Nassau County were Democrats. In 1905, these suspicions proved to be true; the Republicans lost the election for Supervisor of the Town of Hempstead, the largest town in the county. They regained control in 1907, and lost again two years later. The swing between Democrats and Republicans showed that neither party had established a firm grip on the electorate.<sup>29</sup>

In 1909, G. Wilbur Doughty devised a proposal that would not only stop the political swings between the Democrats and the Republicans but would shape the outline of what would become the political machine.<sup>30</sup> The people moving to Nassau County from the city quickly discovered that the towns and villages did not provide basic municipal services such as sidewalks, street lighting and trash pick-up that they expected. Their neighbors, the wealthy estate owners, made no such demands. They were completely self-sufficient. They had built their own roads, provided their own lighting, water and trash removal. They neither wanted nor needed local government.

To deliver these services, Doughty devised a plan that called for the establishment of special districts. Special Districts were designed to deliver a particular municipal service to a specific geographical area.<sup>31</sup> Part of the plan included giving the districts taxing and bonding authority in order to establish their own revenue stream. Governed by either a Town Board, a separately elected Board or Commission, or by a Board or Commission, the leaders of special districts were appointed by the local authorities. It was left to local elected officials to distribute jobs and select the vendors who could build roads, maintain facilities, and deliver needed supplies.

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55,448 to 83,930. Land prices also increased dramatically. "Long Island Shows Rising Land Values," *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1911.

<sup>29</sup> Smits, "Government in Nassau," 24. It also may have been that the native Long Islanders overspent because they emulated the robber barons. Richard Hofstadter cites how at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, money became the standard of success, not public service. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York: Vintage Books, 1948), 172.

<sup>30</sup> "G.W.Doughty Dead; Republican Leader," *New York Times*, Sept 28, 1930. Doughty's obituary states that he was the "father of the plan for forming sanitary districts, each comprising a number of villages and having its own organization of garbage collection."

<sup>31</sup> "Town Special Districts in New York: Background, Trends and Issues," *Local Government Issues in Focus* Vol. 3 No. 1 (New York State Comptroller's Office, Division of Local Government Service and Economic Development. March 2007), 3.

Following the passage of Doughty's amendment, special districts were established throughout the county, creating an uneven patchwork of small local governments, each charged with delivering a specific service. With no centralized form of county government, the districts gave local leaders the opportunity to distribute jobs and contracts to their friends, family and supporters.<sup>32</sup>

The creation of special districts became a necessary component of Doughty's efforts to maintain power in Nassau County. Not only did he face challenges from the Democrats, in 1912, a presidential election year, Doughty was faced with a split in the national Republican Party. On one side were the "Old Guard" followers of conservative William Howard Taft. On the other, was his good friend Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt had decided to challenge Taft for the presidency of the United States by running on his Bull Moose Party ticket. In Nassau County, Doughty led the majority of the Republicans to cast their vote for Roosevelt. But the conservatives pulled enough votes away from Roosevelt to throw the election to the Democratic presidential nominee, Woodrow Wilson.<sup>33</sup>

It was the first time that the voters in the Long Island area now known as Nassau County voted for a Democrat for President of the United States. Following the election, Doughty set out to regain power for his wing of the party. To overcome the conservative Taft supporters within his own party and eliminate the Democratic Party from power, Doughty had to find a way convince voters to support the moderate Republicans. To build a base of support, he turned to road construction and infrastructure improvements.

### The Seeds of Patronage

Control of land development around their mansions was very important to the moneyed Gold Coast residents. It was so important, that even though they may have spent only one quarter of the year (and some as little as one month of the year) on the North Shore, they chose to vote on Long Island rather

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<sup>32</sup> Smits, "Government in Nassau," 28.

<sup>33</sup> Smits, *Nassau Suburbia*, 18–42. The vote was Wilson, 7,073, Roosevelt, 6,563 and Taft, 4,608.

than in any of the other places where they owned homes.<sup>34</sup> From their mansions, however, they could see over the hedges and stone walls that protected them from the outside world. They observed how people were moving to Nassau County and surmised that the new residents receiving such niceties as trash removal, sewers, water and street lighting, services would soon look to the wealthy property owners to help pay for those services.

The *New York Times* described their exclusiveness as a desire to protect themselves against the undesirable encroachments from surrounding communities.” At the beginning of the twentieth century, Roswell Eldridge and his wife, Louise Skidmore Eldridge, found a solution.<sup>35</sup> The Eldridge’s owned a 600 acre estate named Saddle Rock on Little Neck Bay.<sup>36</sup> In 1910, state statutes for municipal incorporation required the submission of a petition signed by 250 residents. Eldridge prevailed upon the state legislature to change the incorporation law to require signatures from a mere 50 residents.<sup>37</sup>

Following the changes in the law, Eldridge submitted a petition of seventy-seven signatures, signed by his many employees and family members living on the estate that incorporated Eldridge’s estate as the Village of Saddle Rock.<sup>38</sup> Eldridge was “elected” its first mayor with his employees serving as village officials.<sup>39</sup> Turning estates into villages not only protected the wealthy, it contributed to the growth of the Nassau Republican Party. Owners like Eldridge pressured their employees to vote a certain way. As one estate superintendent said, “I was told to take the men down (to the polls) and make sure they voted Republican.”<sup>40</sup>

The success of the Village of Saddle Rock led to a flurry of incorporations in Nassau County. Smaller estates (with less than fifty employees) joined with adjacent wealthy neighbors and they, too,

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<sup>34</sup> Sobin, *Dynamics of Community Change*, 66.

<sup>35</sup> “Creating Villages Held Fad in Nassau,” *New York Times*, Oct 27, 1932.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. *Local Government Issues in Focus*, 3; Judith Goldstein, “*Inventing Great Neck: Jewish Identity and the American Dream*” (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 50.

<sup>37</sup> Sobin, *Dynamics of Community Change*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> “Proposition for the Incorporation of Saddle Rock,” Great Neck File, October 26, 1910, Great Neck Library, Great Neck, NY.

<sup>39</sup> Goldstein, *Inventing Great Neck*, 52.

<sup>40</sup> Sobin, *Dynamics of Community Change*, 84.

incorporated. In some instances, villages were created around private golf clubs. Great Neck Estates, for example, was incorporated in 1911. Ten years later, its population was still only 339 residents.<sup>41</sup>

Residents who were not wealthy supported the incorporation of their communities because they believed that they were on the verge of being “swallowed up by New York City.”<sup>42</sup> Their sole purpose was to “obtain maximum political control on the local level,” believing that life on Long Island life was “best when strangers from ‘away’ were kept out.”<sup>43</sup> Between 1920 and 1932, forty-six villages were incorporated in Nassau County, the trend only coming to a halt at the onset of the Depression.<sup>44</sup>

### The Birth of the Machine

In 1915, there were only 107 regular employees in the county and 115 employees in all of the towns combined, not enough to turn an election.<sup>45</sup> To build the party and expand his power, Doughty turned to patronage. His approach was not unusual for a politician looking for political power. Many of the nation’s urban centers were run by political machines.<sup>46</sup> What was unusual and different about Nassau County was that it was rural with no centralized form of government.

During the early twentieth century, Nassau County was governed by a board made up of the supervisors of the county’s three towns.<sup>47</sup> To build roads and other infrastructure projects, funds were distributed equally among the towns. Following Doughty’s election as Supervisor of the Town of Hempstead, the largest town in the county, he changed the county distribution formula based on population, increasing Hempstead’s share by \$100,000.<sup>48</sup> Doughty went further to control road funds by

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<sup>41</sup> Shupe. 22.

<sup>42</sup> “Fear Annexation: Residents of Post Washington, L.I. Advocate Incorporation,” *New York Times*, March 24, 1912.

<sup>43</sup> Sobin. *Dynamics of Community Change*, 99.

<sup>44</sup> “Outdate Municipal Structures.” *Local Government Issues in Focus* Vol. 2 No. 3, (Albany, New York: New York State Comptroller’s Office Division of Local Government Service and Economic Development, Oct. 2006): 26–28.  
<http://www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/pubs/research/munistructures.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Boulay and DiGaetano, “Why Did Political Machines Disappear?” 25-49; Michael P. McCarthy, “On Bosses, Reformers, and Urban Growth: Some Suggestions for a Political Typology of American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* (Nov. 1, 1997): 29–38.

<sup>47</sup> The towns were Hempstead, North Hempstead and Oyster Beach.

<sup>48</sup> “Pertinent Paragraphs From Nassau County,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 17, 1919.

making sure that a close associate, Aubrey Pettit, was appointed as Superintendent of County Buildings.<sup>49</sup>

With additional road building funds in the town and a political ally as the county superintendent of buildings, Doughty was in complete control.

Building and construction in the county and within special districts soared; tax revenues went from \$1,900,000 in 1920 to over \$8,000,000 in 1930. The spate of village incorporations called for a massive amount of building leading to a continuous flow of workers moving to Nassau County. Building and construction contracts went to Doughty's partner and brother-in-law, Andrew Weston, president of Booth and Weston, "the largest contracting firm in the County," and to the Hendrickson Brothers, with whom he had a close relationship.<sup>50</sup> Construction jobs went through Doughty, giving him an escalating source of jobs to distribute as patronage.<sup>51</sup>

The men who were hired to work on the construction and building projects were expected to register as Republicans and join the county committee. Doughty made sure that their responsibilities included contributing to the Nassau Republican Party; making sure that they and their friends, families and neighbors voted Republican on Election Day; and pressuring local officials to support construction and building projects by participating in rallies at town and village meetings. Using these methods, Doughty built a cadre of loyal Republicans whose membership in the Republican Party was tied to their job security.

Throughout the 1920s, the Board of Supervisors continued to increase allocations for road construction by increasing property taxes and borrowing money. To avoid oversight by the state, and increase local discretion over road funds, the Board of Supervisors even turned back state funds by fifteen percent, making up the difference in their road-building budget by increasing the county's bonded

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<sup>49</sup> "Supervisors Split on Appointment," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Sept. 5, 1918. Doughty was able to maneuver Pettit's appointment despite the fact that there were two men ahead of him on the civil service list.

<sup>50</sup> Caro, *Power Broker*, 209. Booth and Weston and the Hendrickson Brothers were given the "lion's share" of Nassau County construction contracts.

<sup>51</sup> Smits, "Government in Nassau," 28.



indebtedness. Control of funds was paramount to Doughty and his allies; and as far as who was going to repay it in the future, they “let responsibility fall where it would.”<sup>52</sup>

### Reform and Reformers

Doughty’s cavalier approach to county debt extended to other activities as well. In 1920, he and his cohorts were charged with “an alleged conspiracy to give protection to professional gamblers in Nassau County.”<sup>53</sup> He escaped conviction only because the star witness in the trial decided to go to Havana, Cuba rather than testify.<sup>54</sup> A year later, his handpicked Superintendent of Buildings Aubrey Pettit, pled guilty to running a stolen car ring, and was sentenced to Sing Sing prison.<sup>55</sup>

Doughty and Nassau County were developing a reputation as a place where “zoning was bought and sold like potatoes” with Doughty and his friends the beneficiaries. Good government advocates railed against the practice of “political contractors” in Nassau County, claiming that Doughty was “always interested in suggestions for public works that could help open the Island for development” as long as the purchase was large enough so that he and his friends could profit.<sup>56</sup> Municipal reformer Robert Moses wrote that Nassau County was overrun by an “old-fashioned, unintelligent ring, living on road and other patronage, and principally engaged during the last two years in dodging indictments.”<sup>57</sup>

The towns, villages and special districts were increasingly viewed as a wasteful duplication of services, and the cost for services was rising. In 1923, the Democrats used these growing concerns as a way to extricate Doughty and the Republicans from power. They introduced a bill in the state legislature calling for a referendum to consolidate local government services and limit home rule in Nassau County.

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<sup>52</sup> “Best Road System in State is Aim of County Officials,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Sep 19, 1920; Smits, *Nassau Suburbia USA*, 52. By 1930, the total debt for highways in the county was \$20 million.

<sup>53</sup> “Explaining the Jungle of Politics in Nassau,” *New York Times*, March 16, 1924.

<sup>54</sup> “Star Witness Gone, May Halt Trial in Gambling Case,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Dec. 15, 1920.

<sup>55</sup> “Plant and Pettit Admit Guilt in Theft of Cars; May Incriminate Others,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 11, 1921. A month before a special committee of the State Assembly convened to investigate corrupt practices in Nassau County, Pettit received a visit by Doughty and McWhinney. Pettit claimed that the visit was simply a discussion for the possibility of parole and had nothing to do with his past criminal activities or others who may have been involved. “Strongs Party Foes To Be Attacked: Meets Perkins Accusation,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1922.

<sup>56</sup> For quote see Caro, *Power Broker*, 208. See also Carl Degler, *Out of Our Past: The Forces That Shaped Modern America* (New York: Harper Row, 1970), 364.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Moses, “Home Rule For Two New York Counties,” *National Municipal Review* Vol. XI 1922: 6.

If approved by the voters, the bill would limit the powers vested in village government, curtail the authority of special districts, and eliminate many local elected offices. Doughty's access to a growing number of patronage appointments would be curtailed, and spending throughout the county could be monitored.<sup>58</sup>

Not wanting to appear to be against good government efforts, Nassau Republicans initially went along with the Democrats and pledged support for the bill. But they knew that consolidation of municipal services would wipe out their control of patronage, and that their power would be severely diminished. To fight back against the Democrats' reform plan, Doughty warned voters that the measure "would place Nassau County in line for annexation by New York City." Long Islanders, always wary of their loud and boisterous neighbor to the west, took heed. Charter reform was defeated by a vote of 18,507 to 8,654.<sup>59</sup> Nassau Democrats were not discouraged by their defeat and, in the hope of prying loose the Republicans grip on the county continued their drumbeat for reform.

In 1924, charges of corruption in building, paving, and bootlegging in Nassau County reached a crescendo when New York Governor Al Smith convened an "Extraordinary Grand Jury" to investigate the allegations.<sup>60</sup> One aspect of the inquiry was the excessive construction costs of the Long Beach Bridge.<sup>61</sup> Doughty's response was once again to cry "Tammany Hall," claiming that the scurrilous accusations were instigated by Democrats for political purposes. When a star witness conveniently went on vacation and became unable to testify and other witnesses took vows of silence, Doughty was able to skirt the charges.

### Robert Moses and the Machine

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<sup>58</sup> Smits, "Government in Nassau," 23.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 40–41.

<sup>60</sup> "Exploring the Jungle of Politics in Nassau," *New York Times*, March 16, 1924.

<sup>61</sup> "Call 40 Witnesses for Nassau Inquiry: Extraordinary Grand Jury to Convene at Mineola Tomorrow Morning" *New York Times*, April 6, 1924. The bridge spanned a small inlet and cost one million dollars.

The demands of the good government advocates, government investigations, and accusations of foul play from the Democratic Party were soon drowned out by the sounds of construction crews. Robert Moses was appointed as New York State Parks Commissioner. Drawn to Nassau County's pristine shoreline and open expanse, his plans included developing the south shore of Long Island as a vast parkland for the teeming masses of New York City. To that end, Moses received millions of dollars in state funding to build roads, parks and bridges in Nassau County to provide access for visitors.<sup>62</sup>

Initially, Moses was a harsh critic of the county's political machine. He ignored Doughty and the Nassau Republicans, and submitted his proposals directly to local government authorities. But after losing a referendum for an access road in Long Beach necessary to carry out his plans, Moses realized that he would have to make private arrangements with Doughty if he wanted his proposals to succeed. Moses decided to give Doughty and his associate's access to development plans *before* they were made available to the public, affording them the opportunity to purchase land intended for development at a low price. After the plans were approved, Doughty and his cohorts sold the land to the state at a profit. By engaging in these actions, Moses became known as a "political contractor."

Doughty's friends, Andy Weston and the Hendrickson Brothers, received all of the construction contracts; and they became the largest and most powerful contractors in Nassau County.<sup>63</sup> Their company, the Local Sand & Gravel Company of Mineola, grew quickly and soon the Hendrickson Brothers controlled all of the sand and gravel pits in Nassau County as well as several trucking companies.<sup>64</sup> Their relationship with Doughty was personal and political. Andrew Weston was an executive member of the Lawrence-Cedarhurst Republican Club. One of the Hendrickson brothers, Arthur Hendrickson, was the

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<sup>62</sup> Caro, *Power Broker*, 218.

<sup>63</sup> The understanding between Moses and Doughty was a "secret" and was never publicly acknowledged by either man. Moses gave Hempstead politicians access to Long Island State Planning Commission plans. The alliance between Moses and Doughty and later with Doughty's nephew, J. Russel Sprague would be an "open secret of Long Island politics for the next forty years." Caro, *Power Broker*, 1190; "Sewer Bond Issue Private Sale Sought," *Nassau Herald*, Feb. 12, 1935; "Weston Gets Contract For Sewer Line," *Nassau Herald*, Feb. 12, 1935; "5,000 Barrels of Cement in Sewer," *Nassau Herald*, May 14, 1935; "Local Contractors To Build Wing," *Nassau Herald*, June 2, 1936; "Spur of Road Work Starts in Lawrence," *Nassau Herald*, Nov. 5, 1935.

<sup>64</sup> "Nassau Sand Pits Are Combined in \$500,000 Merger," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 7, 1932.

mayor of Valley Stream.<sup>65</sup> The relationship with these contractors was vital to growth of the Nassau Republicans. They made sure that the workers they hired understood who gave them their jobs.

The benefits of their arrangement were long lasting. Jones Beach, a seaside park designed and built by Moses on the South Shore of Nassau County proved wildly popular.<sup>66</sup> Facing the Atlantic Ocean and in close proximity to New York City, it was complete with bathhouses, pools and restaurants. Jones Beach was an enormous project, providing hundreds of construction jobs. Following its completion in 1929, more than fifteen hundred jobs were created at the park. Seasonal workers were hired as “lifeguards, special police, gardeners, parking-field and bathhouse attendants, janitors and toll takers” to take care of the ten-mile stretch.<sup>67</sup>

Initially, Nassau Democrats were elated at the number of jobs being created at Jones Beach. They wrongly assumed that because New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt was a Democrat and had appointed Robert Moses as the State Parks Commissioner, hiring at Jones Beach would be handed over to the leaders of the Democratic Party. Moses rejected Democratic demands to control hiring. Even after the governor intervened and asked Moses to give Democrats the right to hire workers at the parks, he still refused. Not only was Moses a Republican, he had additional development plans for Nassau County, and as far as he was concerned, it was Doughty and the Nassau County GOP that controlled local zoning laws and code enforcement, not the governor. As long as Moses could be assured of continued state-funding of his plans by the state legislature, the political plums that grew out of the Jones Beach development would fall into the laps of the county Republicans.

#### Italian-Americans and the Republican Party

Italian immigrants began to arrive on Long Island during the late nineteenth century to help build the vast estates on the north shore of Long Island. Some were skilled workers such as masons,

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<sup>65</sup> “Woodmere High Scene of “Real Old Rally,” *Nassau Herald*, Oct. 22, 1935.

<sup>66</sup> John Hanc, *Jones Beach: An Illustrated History* (Guilford, Connecticut: Pequot Press, 2007), 156.

<sup>67</sup> Caro. *Power Broker*, 305.

bricklayers, and gardeners, while others were “pick and shovel” laborers recruited from the crowded tenements of New York City.<sup>68</sup> It took anywhere from two to seven years to build the mansions, and workers often settled nearby, forming permanent communities outside of the estates walls.<sup>69</sup>

One of the areas where labor was in short supply was the Port Washington sand pits. The sand there was of a high quality that was much in demand. There was an enormous amount of building in New York City, and the sand was necessary for the strong cement needed for the new subways and skyscrapers. Mine owners recruited Italian immigrants to Port Washington, and they too settled in the area and made Nassau County their permanent home.<sup>70</sup>

During the 1920s, dire economic conditions in Italy caused a surge in Italian immigration, and by 1926 there were 1,500,000 Italians in the State of New York—the largest concentration of Italians in the country. In the Borough of Brooklyn, adjacent to Long Island, there were 350,000 Italians.<sup>71</sup> Many of the immigrants came from the southern part of Italy, Calabria and Sicily. Their villages in Italy were small and impoverished, and there was little opportunity to engage in political activity.<sup>72</sup> The political and social structure of the Italian villages was rigid. A powerful local leader, called a *padrone*, conducted the everyday affairs of the village and oversaw the lives of the people who lived there. To get a job, acquire housing or receive help or advice, villagers went to the *padrone*.

Italian immigrants to the United States continued the *padrone* tradition. In the immigrant community, a strong network was established where residents looked to a local leader for help in navigating their needs for housing and employment.<sup>73</sup> In New York City, one of the most densely-populated areas of Italian immigrants, contractors used *padrones* to recruit Italian immigrants from city

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<sup>68</sup> Salvatore LaGumina, “Long Island Italians and the Labor Movement,” *Long Island Forum* (January, 1985): 6; LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburbs*, 6.

<sup>69</sup> LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburbs*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Elly Shodell, ed., *Particles of the Past: Sandmining on Long Island 1870s-1980s* (Port Washington, NY: Port Washington Public Library, 1985), 8.

<sup>71</sup> “Italians, Independent Thinkers, Divide Politically Among Old Parties: 24,000 are Democrats, 20,000 Republicans in Boro,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 30, 1926.

<sup>72</sup> LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburbs*, 16; LaGumina, “Italian American Political Activity,” 53–59.

<sup>73</sup> Edwin Fenton, “Italians in the Labor Movement,” *Pennsylvania History* Vol. 26, No. 2, (1959): 133–148.

neighborhoods to come work as day laborers on Long Island, paying the padrone a fee for each person who was employed.<sup>74</sup>

During the early twentieth century, an increasing number of Italian immigrants settled in Inwood.<sup>75</sup> There, they formed the San Cono Society, a community-based organization that helped immigrants adjust to life in America.<sup>76</sup> Doughty astutely recognized the potential of immigrants as a political force and recruited Italian immigrants to the Republican Party and formed the Italian-American Republican Club of Inwood.<sup>77</sup> Italian-American Republican clubs were also formed in Glen Cove, Freeport and Lynbrook.<sup>78</sup>

Though Doughty recognized the advantages of opening the party to Italian immigrants, native-born Republicans viewed them with alarm. Long Islanders were generally biased against anyone from New York City. The Italian immigrants represented the city, and the fact that they spoke a different language and were Catholics further contributed to Long Islanders' unease.

Fanning the flames of this tension was the rise of the Klu Klux Klan on Long Island.<sup>79</sup> During the 1920s, the KKK became widespread on Long Island: about one in seven Long Islanders was a member of the Klan during this time.<sup>80</sup> Klan leaders became active in local Republican politics, winning elections in numerous communities, including Oyster Bay in Nassau County. In fact, in 1923, the organization of women Klan members, known as the Kamelia, was chosen as "the most popular organization in Nassau County."<sup>81</sup> In Roosevelt, the Klan held a weeklong celebration complete with "floats, parades, rallies and carnivals."<sup>82</sup> In 1924, the Klan even took control of the Republican Committee in neighboring Suffolk County, where the county leader was also a leader in the KKK.

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<sup>74</sup> LaGumina, *From Steerage To Suburbs*, 22.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 15, 40–44. Italian immigrants were the source of manual labor on roads, the sand pits of Port Washington, and small factories.

<sup>76</sup> Salvatore LaGumina, *Images of America: Long Island Italians* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 20. The "Societa Politica Italo American" was established in Long Island City just over the border in Queens in 1899.

<sup>77</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 186.

<sup>78</sup> LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburb*, 145.

<sup>79</sup> Jane S. Gombieski, "Klokards, Kleagles, Kludds, and Kluxers: The Ku Klux Klan in Suffolk County, 1915–1928, Part One," *Long Island Historical Journal* Vol. 6, No. 1, (1993): 41–62.

<sup>80</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 178.

<sup>81</sup> "Every Protestant Pulpit Will Be Open to Kamelia Members States Klansman," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 27, 1923.

<sup>82</sup> Jackson, *The Klu Klux Klan*, 178.

In Nassau County, Freeport became the center of Klan activity, and frequent parades were held there. In 1924, one of the parades was led by the Freeport Chief of Police and attended by 30,000 people. In the Town of Hempstead, a “Kolassal Kommunity Kaucus” took place on Labor Day weekend in 1924.<sup>83</sup> Three years later, more than 10,000 Klan members gathered on a field in Lindenhurst where one thousand new members were initiated into the organization, four hundred of them children.<sup>84</sup> In communities all across the island, the Klan sponsored rallies and parades, attracting hundreds and sometimes thousands of people.<sup>85</sup>

Klan Leaders denied accusations that the organization promoted bigotry. Addressing a meeting of several thousand members at a meeting on Long Island in 1923, a Baptist minister explained that they had to fight the perception that Klan members were “anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, anti-colored and anti-foreigner.” Instead, he argued, it was “simply an organization that was banded together for white supremacy and founded on the belief of the tenets of the Protestant Church.”<sup>86</sup>

Doughty’s recruitment of Italian immigrants was in sharp contrast to the manner in which they were treated by the Democratic machine in New York City. There, the potential voting strength of the Italian community by using political boundaries to split and isolate Italian neighborhoods.<sup>87</sup> The Irish of New York City were “slow in reaching out to their fellow Catholics from Italy.”

By the end of the 1920s, twenty-two thousand Italians living in Nassau County had enrolled as Republicans, recruited largely through their work in construction. In Nassau County, construction was the “greatest single source of local employment, numbering 15,905 in 1930.”<sup>88</sup> It was also the most important source of patronage to the Republican Party.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Frank J. Cavaoli, “The Klu Klux Klan on Long Island,” *Long Island Forum* (May, 1979): 100–105.

<sup>84</sup> “Long Island Initiates 1,000 at Holiday Fete,” *NY Herald Tribune*, July 5, 1927.

<sup>85</sup> Goldstein, *Inventing Great Neck*, 38.

<sup>86</sup> “Every Protestant Pulpit,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 27, 1923.

<sup>87</sup> Golway, *Machine Made*, 161.

<sup>88</sup> Smits, *Nassau Suburbia, U.S.A.*, 185; Mary Jane Capozzoli, “The Role of Italian Americans in Nassau County, 1900–1945,” in *Long Island Studies: Evoking a Sense of Place*, Joann P. Krieg ed. (Interlaken, New York: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1988), 158. Local government jobs were a source of patronage but were still few. In 1929, there were only three hundred and twenty nine county employees and forty police officers. Capozzoli. “The Role of Italian Americans,” 158.

<sup>89</sup> Harrison, *Machine Politics*, 2.

By 1930, Nassau Republicans had grown to rely on the support they received from the Italian community. Following the stock market crash, when the economy took a turn for the worst, five hundred Italian Republicans gathered to “serve notice on G.O.P. county leaders.” The meeting was held as a warning “that the Italian-Americans of Nassau should not be denied that which they are entitled to.” Attendees heard from Nicholas Selvaggi, a former United States Attorney General, who exhorted the leaders of the Nassau GOP to take action. He claimed that he had recently led 90,000 Italian Republicans to “bolt” against the Brooklyn GOP for their failure to distribute patronage fairly. Selvaggi demanded that unless Italian Republicans received “recognition in the party councils and in the distribution of patronage,” they would “jump the traces.”<sup>90</sup>

### Organized Labor Arrives

The steady growth of construction jobs in Nassau County soon caught the attention of Joseph Fay. Fay was the Business Agent for Local 825 of the International Union of Operating Engineers in Newark, New Jersey. He had grown up on Long Island, and learned how to operate heavy machinery working in the Port Washington sand pits.<sup>91</sup> Fay’s experiences in the labor movement reflected how difficult it was for unionized construction workers. Most had to fight for a decent wage, sometimes even taking to the streets in hand-to-hand combat to protect their livelihood.

Joe Fay was a tough character, and before he became a business agent he had several scrapes with the law. Throughout his career, there was speculation that he was involved in criminal activities. While working in northern New Jersey, Fay was associated with the corrupt Frank Hague, the Democratic

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<sup>90</sup> “Italians Ask L.I. Patronage; Threaten Bolt,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 17, 1930. Since there were only 44,000 registered Italian voters in 1926, it is hardly likely that 90,000 voters left the Republican Party to join the Democrats.

<sup>91</sup> A.H. Raskin, “The Story of Joe Fay: Labor Ruler From Jail,” *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1953. Fay was a protégé of Theodore Brandle, who headed the building trades in Jersey City. During the 1920s, Brandle and Fay were associated with the Democratic political machine of Mayor Frank Hague. Hague and Brandle’s alliance fell apart when Hague turned on Brandle during the last stages of the building the Pulaski Skyway. Hague was in league with the National Erectors Association, and when union members went on strike to protest against the use of non-union labor, Hague directed the municipal police force to attack the strikers. Steven Hart, *The Last Three Miles: Politics, Murder, and the Construction of America’s First Superhighway* (New York: The New Press, 2007); John Hutchinson, *The Imperfect Union: A History of Corruption in American Trade Unions* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970), 49.



Mayor of Jersey City. Hague had a relationship with the building trades, and with their support, built a powerful political machine.<sup>92</sup>

Fay was harsh and aggressive in his dealings with contractors, but he negotiated good contracts for his members and won their gratitude. Once, during a period when he was suspended by the International Union, the members re-elected him anyway. With few labor laws to protect their rights, construction workers had to depend on their business agent “who would not take no for an answer” from contractors who refused to build using union labor.<sup>93</sup> Under Fay’s leadership, the local union membership grew from a paltry 150 to more than 1,000 members; and weekly wages tripled.<sup>94</sup> In 1927, the members gave him an even bigger vote of confidence: they elected him Business Agent for the rest of his life.<sup>95</sup>

During the 1920s, there was no organized labor movement on Long Island. Members of the construction trades unions who lived on Long Island belonged to the Brooklyn-based Building Trades Council and attended meetings there.<sup>96</sup> To organize construction workers on Long island, Joseph Fay selected his protégé, William DeKoning. DeKoning was a hard worker who grew up in dire poverty in Queens. He came to Nassau County sometime around 1930, and it was later rumored that he arrived with a number of blank AFL charters stuffed in his back pocket.<sup>97</sup> Fay sent him to unionize workers in the place he knew best, the sand mines of Port Washington.

There were approximately three to four hundred men working in the sand mines, most of them Italian immigrants. They were paid \$1.50 per day, and they were required to live in company shacks, separate and isolated from the rest of the Port Washington community.<sup>98</sup> With as many as fifty workers in

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<sup>92</sup> Hart, *The Last Three Miles*, 109–111. Hart describes the fight between the proponents of the open shop and the building trades unions of northern NJ. “Firm Paid \$289,462. To Keep Open Shop,” *New York Times*, March 4, 1937.

<sup>93</sup> Palladino, *Skilled Hands*, 16.

<sup>94</sup> “Fay a Big Factor in Building Unions,” *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1940.

<sup>95</sup> Raskin, “The Story of Joe Fay,” *New York Times*.

<sup>96</sup> “Building Workers Endorse Democrats: Brooklyn and Long Island Trade Delegates Declare for National and State Tickets,” *New York Times*, Oct. 8, 1924.

<sup>97</sup> Justin Ostro, telephone interview with author, March 31, 2015. Ostro worked on Long Island and was an organizer beginning in the early 1950s. He became General Vice-president of the International Association of Machinists (retired). During the 1930s, the structure of AFL unions were fluid. The AFL was not centralized and local unions had a great deal of autonomy and accommodated changes. Christopher L. Tomlins, “AFL Unions in the 1930s: Their Performance in Historical Perspective,” *Journal of American History* 65 (March 1979):1026–1042; Bernie Bookbinder, “DeKoning: LI Labor’s Feudal Baron,” *Newsday*, Oct. 19, 1957. There are conflicting accounts of exactly when it was that DeKoning arrived on Long Island.

<sup>98</sup> George L. Williams, “Sand Mining in Port Washington,” *Long Island Forum* (February 1983): 36–37.

a shack, each employee paid rent that ranged from \$3.00 to \$8.00 a month.<sup>99</sup> Mining was done by pick and shovel; it was brutal, back-breaking work. Conditions were dangerous, and there were many accidents. Through a process called bank mining, workers known as cavers would stand at the edge of a sand pit and create landslides using 30-foot poles. Miners at the bottom of the pit scooped up by hand the sand that fell to the bottom of the pit and loaded it into wagons. Occasionally sand cave-ins occurred, suffocating the miners. Later, when steam shovels, conveyors, and other types of machinery were introduced, the mines remained dangerous, and workers would sometimes get caught in the machinery.

Just as DeKoning arrived to organize workers in Nassau County, G. Wilbur Doughty died.<sup>100</sup> His death was a harsh blow to the Nassau Republicans. There was a great deal of money at stake; over twelve million dollars were spent for highway construction in 1930 alone, and the county was deeply in debt. There were two vacancies created by his death: leadership of the Nassau County Party, and the office of Supervisor of the Town of Hempstead. It was up to the membership of the county committee to quickly find a new leader.

The day after Doughty's funeral, 500 delegates attended the Nassau County GOP convention. Their first order of business was to fill the supervisor position. Their unanimous choice was Doughty's nephew, J. Russel Sprague. He was forty two years old, an attorney who also served as a police judge in the village of Lawrence. He was a local rising politician with important family ties: his mother was Doughty's sister, and his father was Doughty's business partner in the oyster business.<sup>101</sup>

The choice for Nassau County Republican leader was far more contentious. On one side was Sprague, who, with the support of a coterie of party insiders, laid claim to his late uncle's position as party leader. Another contender was Assemblyman Edwin Wallace, who claimed that G. Wilbur Doughty had "willed" him the position before he died.<sup>102</sup> Nassau County Republicans were unable to make a choice between the two men and the convention adjourned. The party was left without a leader, and as

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<sup>99</sup> LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburbs*, 11; LaGumina, "Long island Italians," 32–38.

<sup>100</sup> "G.W.Doughty GOP Leader of Nassau, Dies," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Sept 27, 1930. Doughty died on September 27, 1930 following an operation for a stomach ailment.

<sup>101</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 37.

<sup>102</sup> "Democrats Hope for Nassau Break," *New York Times*, Aug. 19, 1934.

they wrangled over the next five years, their indecisiveness left the Nassau Republican's vulnerable to the rise of Democratic sentiment and the growing power of the labor movement.

## *Chapter Two*

### *Labor and the GOP Get a New Deal*

Between 1930 and 1937, the Nassau Republicans underwent a transformation. In 1930, the full effects of the stock market crash and the Depression were just beginning to be felt. The Republican President, Herbert Hoover, floundered in response to the worsening economic conditions. Looking for relief, desperate voters turned to the Democratic Party.<sup>1</sup>

Support for the GOP declined across the country. Between 1932 and 1936, voters across New York State delivered solid majorities for the Democrats, that is, everywhere except for Nassau County where the win margins for Republicans increased.<sup>2</sup> Nassau County Republicans retained their power in the 1930s even as New Deal Democrats consolidated majorities across the country.

Nassau County Republicans maintained power by endorsing unemployment relief, government jobs, and higher wages. They took ownership of New Deal programs, taking credit for Democratic reforms and making them their own.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, the Nassau County Republicans became the champions of the building trades unions in their battle for prevailing rate on government jobs.

The rise of organized labor and its new and growing relationship with the Republicans altered the political dynamics in Nassau County. The heart of this alliance was the relationship between J. Russel Sprague, the Republican county leader and William DeKoning, the powerful head of the AFL construction trades. Sprague emerged as the leader of the county party by first, thwarting the attempts of the state chairman to raid the Nassau County Republican treasury and later, by fending off the Democrat's design to take over the county by promoting government reform. By introducing his own plan, Sprague consolidated county government and became Nassau's first county executive. With his powerful friends in organized labor, Nassau County was positioned to enter onto the national stage.

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<sup>1</sup> Brodsky, *The Great Mayor*, 233.

<sup>2</sup> Rosenbaum, "The Political Consequences," 63. From 1920 to 1964, Nassau Republicans consistently delivered Republican pluralities in all state and federal candidates. For gubernatorial candidates, the county delivered a mean of 63.4%.

<sup>3</sup> Lupinski-Huvane and Singer, "The Great Depression," 26-29.

### Nassau GOP Embraces Relief

In January 1931, New York Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt introduced a program to help state residents who had been hit hard by the Depression. Called the Temporary Emergency Relief Agency (TERA), the program was designed to provide relief by creating construction jobs.<sup>4</sup> The state paid for labor costs, while county government was responsible for paying for supplies and supervision. Nassau Republicans did not criticize the intent of the program; relief was necessary and they welcomed help for local residents. Because TERA was a state program, created by a Democratic governor, Nassau Democrats assumed it would be used to benefit of their party.

In Nassau County, there was no county government or existing bureaucracy to carry out the program. To solve this problem, the Board of Supervisors created the Emergency Work Bureau of Nassau County. The Bureau had minimal responsibility: it was to allocate aid to the three towns, two cities, villages, special districts, and hamlets of the county.<sup>5</sup> Under the control and watchful eye of the Republican Board of Supervisors, the Bureau would process payments, purchase supplies and hire local workers to supervise projects.<sup>6</sup> By creating the Nassau Emergency Work Bureau, the Republicans cleverly deprived the Democrats of an opportunity to distribute patronage. Instead, TERA was used by the Republicans to build their political network and curry favor with voters. County Democrats fought back by claiming the bureau added yet another layer of bureaucracy to an already confusing maze of local government. Even Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt criticized Nassau County's relief bureau, calling it "unreasonably expensive, wasteful and inefficient."<sup>7</sup>

The jousting over patronage to gain political power was intense and unequivocal, but it was typical of the times. Most of these battles were between opposing political parties and rarely exposed to public scrutiny. The rapid introduction of state and federal aid programs during the New Deal exacerbated the struggle for control over patronage. An October 1932 article provides insight into the details

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<sup>4</sup> Smits, *Nassau Suburbia*, 75; Brodsky, *The Great Mayor*, 232. TERA was also called the Wicks Bill.

<sup>5</sup> "Nassau Votes \$50,000 Fund to Job Bureau," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Dec. 22, 1931.

<sup>6</sup> Smits, *Nassau Suburbia*, 75; Smits, "Government in Nassau," 27.

<sup>7</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 75.

surrounding one such battle. Morton Clark, the president of the Silver Lake Heights Civic Association of Baldwin and a foreman on an unemployment relief project, claimed that a Republican committeeman tried to force him to fire forty Democrats on a relief project. In their place, he was supposed to hire Republicans. Disgusted, he claimed that his experience reflected a “county-wide condition,” and resigned his appointment as a Republican election inspector.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the programs were designed to be administered by local government. But it soon became apparent that local municipalities were woefully unprepared to take on these tasks, not just in Nassau County but all across the country. Campaigns to centralize and reform local governments soon emerged. It became a trend, especially in areas outside of large cities, where a “highly diffused pattern of authority was ill-adapted to administering relief on the scale demanded.”

To streamline government operations, reformers sought “to centralize executive authority in an appointed manager or elected county executive.”<sup>9</sup> In Nassau County, reformers argued that to solve fiscal and administrative problems, a county leader would have better oversight and control over economic relief instead of the hodge-podge of decision-makers existing in the towns, villages and special districts.<sup>10</sup>

### Moderate Republicans Meet the Challenge of Reform

Democrats saw the reform movement as a way to challenge Republican domination of Nassau County. At the heart of Republican control of the county was their hold on patronage appointments in the towns and special districts. Democrats continuously looked for ways to compete with the Republicans. When the Republican County Clerk died, the sudden vacancy allowed the deputy clerk, a Democrat, to complete the term of office. The Democrats cheered the clerk’s death because it provided the party an opportunity to dole out patronage jobs to Democrats.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Says Democrats Lose Relief Jobs in Nassau: Republican Resigns,” *New York Times*, Oct. 2, 1932.

<sup>9</sup> Shelland, “The County Executive,” 11.

<sup>10</sup> Derry Dixon, “Reforms Wanted in Nassau County,” *New York Times*, Sept. 23, 1934.

<sup>11</sup> Derry Dixon, “Democrats Hope For Nassau Break,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1934.

The Democrats solution to their problem was to use government reform as a way to eliminate Nassau County's three town governments, two city governments and create a centralized county government. In 1933, the commission refined their plan, recommending that all special districts be abolished except fire and school districts.<sup>12</sup>

To the Nassau Republicans, the Democrats' recommendations constituted an all-out assault. They accused the Democrats of planning to gerrymander district lines in their favor. When the Republican-dominated Board of Supervisors received the recommendations, they refused to forward it to the state legislature for consideration.<sup>13</sup>

Undaunted, the Nassau County Democrats circumvented the Board of Supervisors and went directly to the state legislature, where the Democrats held a majority. Luckily for the Nassau Republicans, the Democrats' reform plan faltered in Albany, and failed to receive consideration. But the events led the Nassau GOP to recognize that if left unchecked, at some point the Democrats would succeed. To be able to maintain their power in the county, they knew that they undertake their own version of reform as well as shore up local support.

One way the Republicans solidified their influence was to increase relief for county residents. But by 1933, the economic malaise of the Depression had deepened. There were 12,000 unemployed men and women on the county payroll, and those numbers were rising.<sup>14</sup> The cost to the county was \$250,000.00 per week; and as the economy steadily deteriorated, local tax revenues fell. The county tried to borrow additional funds but found no buyers for the notes.<sup>15</sup>

Newspaper headlines screamed that the increasing expenditures would cause the county to lay off 10,000 workers already collecting relief.<sup>16</sup> With only \$200,000.00 available through the

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<sup>12</sup> Shelland, "The County Executive," 130; Edward Smits, "Legislative Reorganization in Nassau County, New York" in Marc L. Silver and Martin Melkonian, *Contested Terrain: Power, Politics, and Participation in Suburbia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 176. The Democrats formed the Cuff Bipartisan Commission. "The New Nassau County Charter," *Sea Cliff News*, Vol. LII No. 52 (Nov. 2, 1935).

<sup>13</sup> "Nassau GOP Report Assails Cuff Charter," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Sept. 30, 1935.

<sup>14</sup> "Nassau Board Will Try To Solve Fund Problem Tomorrow," *New York Times*, May 14, 1933.

<sup>15</sup> "Nassau Plans Cuts in Relief Program," *New York Times*, May 15, 1933.

<sup>16</sup> "Nassau To Discharge 10,000 in Relief Jobs," *New York Times*, May 19, 1933.

Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the Board of Supervisors turned to Hempstead Town Supervisor Sprague to find cost savings and make relief efforts more efficient.<sup>17</sup> Miraculously, within days of his appointment, Sprague announced that he had developed a five-point proposal to that end.<sup>18</sup> Part of those efforts included a \$5,000,000.00 loan to the county underwritten by area banks (with whom he had deep connections) replenishing town and county coffers.<sup>19</sup>

Whether or not Sprague's sudden success in getting a loan for the county was by accident or design, it did bring him to the attention of state Republican leaders. They applauded Sprague for his grasp of finances, his bank connections, and his administrative skill. Borrowing money to close the budget gap and providing aid to county residents also proved to be politically sound. With those funds, Sprague was free to design and implement his own programs, specifically designed for his constituents, without interference from state and federal Democrats. With his "keen grasp of the outlook and psychology of the suburban electorate," Sprague developed programs that united the ideals of the New Deal with the partisan needs of the Republican machine.<sup>20</sup>

The local press sang Sprague's praises and pointed out how attentive he was in helping county residents during troubled times.<sup>21</sup> It was helpful to Sprague and Nassau Republicans that the local newspapers, the *Nassau Daily Review* and the *Nassau Daily Star*, were owned by James Stiles, a Republican committeeman. Coincidentally, the papers carried all of the town's legal notices and ads. The ads constituted most of the paper's revenue, so all parties benefitted from the arrangement.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "\$200,000 R.F.C. Loan for Nassau County," *New York Times*, May 11, 1933.

<sup>18</sup> "Nassau Plans Cuts in Relief Program," *New York Times*, May 15, 1933.

<sup>19</sup> "\$5,000,000 Is Lent To Nassau County," *New York Times*, May 25, 1933. Sprague's connections to area banks ran deep. He was one of the organizers of the Rockaway Savings Bank, where he served as trustee and counsel; a trustee and counsel to the Bank of Lawrence; and a director of the Citizens Bank of Freeport. With Sprague's influence, the county received a good credit rating, so the loan repayment cost to the taxpayer was low.

<sup>20</sup> Harrison. "Machine Politics," 59.

<sup>21</sup> Jon M. Greene, "J. Russel Sprague: Wise Guidance in Depression Proved Him," *Nassau Daily Review Star*, Oct. 29, 1937.

<sup>22</sup> "Buys Nassau Daily Star: J.E. Stiles, Publisher of Review, Becomes Owner of Both Papers," *New York Times*, Jan. 30, 1933; Harrison. "Machine Politics," 43–44. An example of their cozy relationship appeared in a large, above-the-fold picture printed in the *Nassau Daily Review* in 1935. With a headline declaring "Nassau Publishers, Editors, Guests of G.O.P. Press Agent," county newspaper publishers and editors are shown gathered around a table at a local steakhouse hosted by J. Russel Sprague. In return for town ad business and complemented by lavish lunches, the newspapers printed stories that complimented the county Republicans.



Despite Sprague's best efforts, economic conditions continued to deteriorate; by 1934 one out every six workers in Nassau County was unemployed. Total relief expenditures in the county continued to rise, and by 1935 they had reached almost \$10 million.<sup>23</sup> There simply wasn't enough tax revenue and borrowing available to sustain relief efforts. Industry in Nassau County was scarce; there were less than four thousand local industrial workers in the entire county. Sprague was forced to admit that the "absence of industries in the county" was a part of the financial problems that Nassau County was facing.<sup>24</sup> But while admitting that "bad economic conditions" were the cause of local problems, he heaped most of the blame on the Democratic legislature in Albany.<sup>25</sup>

To counter the Democrat harping on government reform as a way to solve the economic problems caused by the Depression, the Nassau Republicans offered their own version. They organized their own government reform committee and in 1934, the Republicans hired Thomas H. Reed, a nationally known expert on municipal reform.

Reed spent a year examining all levels of government administration in the county. He concluded that there were, indeed, too many layers of local government delivering duplicate and overlapping services. But Reed also understood that the Board of Supervisors and local GOP leaders had "considerable apprehension" about taking away village and town authority over patronage and contracts. Reed knew that for any reform measure to pass, the efforts of loyal, local party workers would be needed; and they would not endorse any move to take away their livelihood.<sup>26</sup> As Sprague later put it, "We asked the Commission to study the problem, not to bring about revolution but to initiate evolution and to make recommendations."<sup>27</sup>

In his recommendations, Reed maintained that while all of the overlapping local governing bodies were cumbersome, they were what county residents were used to, giving them a sense of "some unity of

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<sup>23</sup> Smits, *Nassau Suburbia*, 75.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>25</sup> "Relief Acute, G.O.P. Told By Sprague," *Nassau Herald*, Jan. 8, 1935.

<sup>26</sup> Shelland, "The County Executive," 155.

<sup>27</sup> John Russel Sprague, *Nassau County Government*, (Mineola, NY: 1940). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924014115640> 17–18.

life.”<sup>28</sup> Instead, he recommended that the structure of county, cities, towns, villages, and special districts be preserved. What Reed proposed instead was a consolidation of select services to be administered by a county form of government.

The conservative wing of the Republican Party was aghast at the Nassau Republicans’ efforts to increase the government’s reach. Their brand of Republicanism emphasized “small government, fiscal solidity, and isolation from the world.” They believed they were the “only true Republicans” and saw Sprague and the Nassau Republicans as “willing to flirt with New Deal” like “dratted reformers.”<sup>29</sup> To the Old Guard Republicans, the Nassau GOP was weak, unorganized, and in danger of losing to the Democrats. On the other hand, the Nassau Republicans welcomed Reed’s proposals. As moderates, they believed government had an important role in providing for the public welfare.

Republican State Party Chairman W. Kingsland Macy, a member of the Old Guard, set out to take advantage of the Nassau County’s GOP perceived weak condition. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the Nassau County Republicans were the beneficiaries of generous contributions from the wealthy Republicans who lived in mansions on the north shore. Concerns over zoning, planning, and the possible development of land outside the perimeters of their estates led them to “split (their contributions) sixty percent for local campaigns and forty percent to state or nation.”<sup>30</sup> With his sights were set on the bulging coffers of the Nassau County party treasury, Macy made a brazen attempt to rob the Nassau County party of their revenue by proposing that all contributions to the Republicans go directly to the state committee’s treasury, bypassing the local party organization.

If enacted, Macy’s measure would have decimated the county party leading Sprague to step forward to lead the charge for its defeat. Two weeks after Macy announced his intentions, the Nassau Republican committee voted to bar the state chairman, or any organization other than the Nassau GOP, from soliciting political contributions from Republicans in the county. They formed a special governing

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<sup>28</sup> Shelland, “The County Executive,” 145. Reed realized that the Republican establishment would never allow the wholesale dismantling of their patronage machine.

<sup>29</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 265; Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free*, 153, 209.

<sup>30</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 137.

committee charged with collecting all contributions to the party, and to distribute patronage. They even prohibited local candidates from raising or expending their own funds.<sup>31</sup> To oversee the governing committee's operations, party members elected Sprague to be its chairman.

Macy's plan had backfired. Sprague saved the Nassau County Republican's treasury from the clutches of the state party. Soon after, Sprague was formally elected as the new chairman of the Nassau Republicans.<sup>32</sup> Years later, Macy would feel the sting of Sprague's wrath in revenge for his attempts to strip the Nassau Republicans of their access to North Shore money.

Following his victory over the conservative Republicans, Sprague, now county leader, continued to face Democratic efforts at government reform. Democrats had presented several bills to the state legislature that called for a referendum to structure a county form of government. The Republicans were in the minority, and despite their vociferous objections, several of the measures passed.<sup>33</sup> Four of the bills were direct attacks on the Nassau County GOP, designed to strip power from local and town governments. One of the bills specifically targeted Sprague as the Supervisor of the Town of Hempstead.<sup>34</sup> Another called for the elimination of the Board of Supervisors and all of the layers of local government.<sup>35</sup> There were ten bills in all; the Republicans called them the "ripper" bills because they were aimed at ripping power from the Republicans. In May, Governor Lehman vetoed five of the measures while the other five were signed and sent to Nassau County to appear on the November 1935 ballot.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Nassau Gives Macy Setback in Fund War," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 16, 1934; "Old Guard To Fight Macy In Primaries," *New York Times*, March 2, 1934; Norton Smith, *Thomas E. Dewey*, 217.

<sup>32</sup> "Control Of Macy Is Cut In Nassau," *New York Times*, March 16, 1934; "Sprague Succeeds Wallace as Nassau County Boss," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 2, 1934.

<sup>33</sup> Smits, "Legislative Reorganization," 176.

<sup>34</sup> Smits, *Nassau Suburbia*, 69. There were several bills under consideration by the Democratically-controlled legislature. One of the bills that was vetoed by Governor Lehman specifically targeted Sprague's power in the county by eliminating one of the two Hempstead Town Supervisors. "Two Farley Bills Vetoed By Lehman," *New York Times*, May 18, 1935; "Fighting Reform in Nassau," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 18, 1935.

<sup>35</sup> "J.R. Sprague Optimistic on Bills' Defeat," *Nassau Herald*, March 26, 1935. One of the bills eliminated one of the two supervisors for the Town of Hempstead, another reduced Hempstead's weighted vote on the Board of Supervisors from 64% to 49%, another mandated that the annual budget reflect the amount designated for home and relief work, and another repealed the use of a revolving fund for relief funds. Harrison, "Machine Politics," 69.

<sup>36</sup> "Five Nassau reform Bills Are Signed," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 17, 1935.

In response to the proposed legislation, Sprague warned residents that charter reform would end home rule, resulting in the loss of “health control, minor courts and facilities for sanitation and water supply.”<sup>37</sup> He orchestrated a countywide letter-writing and petition campaign, and thirty thousand protest letters from the county flooded Albany.<sup>38</sup> And for good measure, Sprague accused the Democrats of intending to bring Tammany government to Long Island.

Democrats dismissed these accusations, claiming that while the threat of the “Tammany Tiger” and the invasion of New York City frightened voters against reform in the past, this time was different.<sup>39</sup> Instead, they argued that the charter reform was about modernization.<sup>40</sup> The issue was about streamlining government, improving funding relief efforts, and providing economic security to the people of Nassau County.

The Nassau Republicans recognized that Democrats presented a compelling argument, particularly when it was couched as a response to addressing adverse economic conditions. Republicans turned the argument around by throwing their support to what was called the Fearon Amendment. Sponsored by a Republican State Senator, the bill was one of the reform measures that was passed and signed by Democratic Governor Lehman. The Fearon Amendment, designed to be put to the voters in November 1935, asked residents whether or not they wanted specific recommendations for reform to be placed on the ballot in November 1936.<sup>41</sup>

This measure was preferred by Nassau Republicans. They had a charter in hand, already written by Thomas Reed. Sprague embarked on a campaign, crisscrossing the county urging voters to support the Fearon Amendment. He attacked the Democrats, claiming that their reforms were Tammany-inspired, and were in reality a stealth plan for New York City to annex the county.<sup>42</sup> The Republicans predicted that passage of any one of the Democrats proposals would guarantee budget increases in the millions of

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<sup>37</sup> “Nassau G.O.P. Report Assails Cuff Charter,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Sept. 30, 1935.

<sup>38</sup> “J.R. Sprague Optimistic on Bills’ Defeat,” *Nassau Herald*, March 26, 1935.

<sup>39</sup> “F.I. Haber Sees Charter Abuse Target,” *Nassau Herald*, Aug. 13, 1935.

<sup>40</sup> “Democratic Club Acts on Charter,” *Nassau Herald*, March 5, 1935.

<sup>41</sup> Shelland, “The County Executive,” 150.

<sup>42</sup> “Sprague Hits ‘Ripper’ Bills As Tammany,” *Nassau Herald*, April 16, 1935.

dollars and that taxes would rise. Furthermore, Sprague alerted his audiences that Nassau's credit would be at risk "if the county were denied the right to borrow for home relief."<sup>43</sup>

Sprague railed against the Democrats, claiming that Republicans were really the party of good government. He accused the Democrats of endangering the welfare of county residents by using work and home relief as a "political football."<sup>44</sup> To prove his point that Republicans cared more about the welfare of county residents, he turned to the program that provided food to needy residents. The state-run program issued tickets to be redeemed at the grocers. Sprague claimed that using the relief tickets in front of their friends and neighbors at the grocery store was undignified for Long Island housewives. To spare them from the humiliation, Sprague convinced the state agency to let the county distribute cash instead of government-issued tickets. The agency agreed, leading the County Board of Supervisors and the Family Service Association of the Community Chest to praise Sprague as a man of great compassion and understanding. He reveled in their compliments, saying that the idea stemmed from his "sincere interest" to protect county residents from "officials and other groups."<sup>45</sup>

The Republicans gained further voter support by declaring a tax holiday for county residents who faced foreclosure on their tax delinquent properties. The program allowed cash-strapped homeowners to delay tax payments and retain ownership of their homes until they could get back on their feet. Another idea was to directly distribute cash as relief payments. This idea did not originate with Sprague, nor was it Republican or Democratic. During the first hundred days of his administration, Franklin Roosevelt supported cash distribution, as did the Republican mayor of New York City, Fiorella LaGuardia. In Nassau County, grateful homeowners and businesses wrote letters to Sprague thanking him for his efforts on their behalf.<sup>46</sup>

Like LaGuardia, Sprague was a progressive Republican; and his position was that in time of economic stress, local government worked best. However, there were major differences between

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<sup>43</sup> "Sprague Hits Democratic Party Heads," *Nassau Herald*, June 11, 1935.

<sup>44</sup> Republican campaign election ads carried the banner "Keep Nassau Solvent—Elect Republican Candidates For Home Rule and Good Government," *Nassau Herald*, Oct. 29, 1935.

<sup>45</sup> "Sprague Acts on Cash Help To The Needy," *Nassau Herald*, May 7, 1935; Harrison, "Machine Politics," 59.

<sup>46</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 58.

LaGuardia and Sprague. LaGuardia's political career was not due to the support of a political machine. As mayor of New York City, LaGuardia had the advantage of a city government already in place, consisting of a vast bureaucracy and a mechanism through which he could implement programs. Sprague had no such advantage. With no county government structure in Nassau, the Board of Supervisors was forced to jerry-rig New Deal programs for the benefit of county residents while making sure that the GOP received the credit. The other major difference between the two moderate Republicans did not become apparent until years after both men left office. When LaGuardia departed elected office, there was no strong Republican Party that he left behind to serve as his political legacy.<sup>47</sup> That was not the case with Sprague.

### Making Permanent Friends

Despite the hard time of the Depression, "hordes of new residents" were arriving on the island. Not knowing whether they leaned Republican or Democrat was unnerving to Sprague. Though the GOP continued to win elections, Sprague realized that in terms of percentage, the party's strength was ebbing and stronger efforts were needed.<sup>48</sup> If the GOP wanted to voters to support their plan for charter reform, they needed to reach out to these potential new voters.

To attract new members to the party, the GOP offered dinner dances complete with orchestra music following the business portion of Republican Party meetings.<sup>49</sup> People from across the county attended these functions and made new friends. By establishing the party as a social organization, the Republicans created a vast county-wide network of people tied together not just by political affiliation but by personal relationships.<sup>50</sup>

Sprague also continued to recruit among Italian immigrants. Sprague reinforced the connections made by his Uncle Doughty and established new ones. Italians were a growing population, second only to Germans, the largest ethnic group on Long Island.<sup>51</sup> Sprague and other Republican leaders became

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<sup>47</sup> Brodsky, *The Great Mayor*, 477–480.

<sup>48</sup> Smits, "Nassau Suburbia," 64.

<sup>49</sup> "Neary Will Install GOP Club Officers," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Feb. 14, 1938.

<sup>50</sup> "Republican Club Inducts Its Officers," *Nassau Herald*, Jan. 29, 1935.

<sup>51</sup> Capozzoli, "The Role of Italian Americans," in *Evoking a Sense of Place*, 153.

frequent guests at Italian-America social and community events. At a dinner held in honor of an Italian World War One hero, Sprague was the featured speaker.<sup>52</sup> During a meeting of the American-Italian Republican Club of Inwood, four hundred Republicans from across the county gathered as Sprague officiated at the swearing-in of the newly-elected officers. It was the largest installation gathering held that year by a Republican club. Following the ceremony, the club elected Sprague as an honorary member.<sup>53</sup>

There were other ways in which the party cemented its ties to the community. Sprague appointed Charles Smith, a Nassau County under-sheriff, as the “spokesman for the American-Italian colony of Inwood who are followers of the Republican Party.” His job was to deal with “all matters pertaining to the G.O.P. in which Italian-Americans are interested” and to advise Sprague on “policy and matters of patronage.”<sup>54</sup> Smith’s appointment gave the Italian community direct access to Sprague. More important, though unforeseen at the time, was that Sprague’s strategy of inclusion established the Republican Party as an integral component of life in Long Island’s Italian community. By the 1960s, Italians had become the largest ethnic group on Long Island and dominated the leadership of the Republican Party. As one Italian-American who grew up during the 1960s and 1970s observed, “You couldn’t go anywhere politically in Nassau County unless you were a member of an Italian-American Club. And those clubs were Republican.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> “Testimonial To Nuzzolo Held May 12,” *Nassau Herald*, April 9, 1935; “Republican Club Inducts Its Officers,” *Nassau Herald*, Jan. 29, 1935; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census* (1930), *Population* (Washington, D.C., 1932), 3:298,299,301.

<sup>53</sup> “Republican Club Inducts Its Officers,” *Nassau Herald*, Jan. 29, 1935; “Sprague Hits Ripper Bill As Tammany,” *Nassau Herald*, April 16, 1935.

<sup>54</sup> “Smith Named Contact Man In Inwood,” *Nassau Herald*, July 23, 1935. Smith was also president of the Inwood Republican Club. Ethnicity separated the two Republican clubs. “Republican Club Names Harry Smith,” *Nassau Herald*, Dec. 17, 1935.

<sup>55</sup> Victor Fusco, interview with author, May 8, 2014. The Nassau County GOP efforts to organize in the Italian community during this period was boosted by FDR’s criticism of Mussolini during the early 1930s and 1940s. Salvatore J. LaGumina, “A Half Century of Italian American Political Activity,” in *Italian Americans on Long Island: Presence and Impact*, Kenneth P. La Valle, ed. (Stony Brook: Forum Italicum, 1996), 61; Stanley B. Klein, “Italian Americans in the Political Arena,” in *Italian Americans on Long Island*, 69. According to Jonathan Rieder, Italian-Americans became the “most anti-Roosevelt of all income groups.” Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 40.

### DeKoning's Rise

Sprague's power, however, ultimately rested on more than his outreach to Italian immigrants and his deft cooptation of the New Deal Democratic reform program. Nassau Republicans depended as well on their alliance with the construction trades unions and their leader, William DeKoning. By the early 1930s, DeKoning had organized two locals of the Operating Engineers on Long Island, and he had begun to unionize other building trades. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) made him a general organizer, giving him the authority to determine the most effective action necessary to organize workers.

In one instance, when a contractor building a railroad bridge in Hicksville hired non-union stonecutters, DeKoning called for a sympathetic strike and pulled the hoisting engineers off of the job.<sup>56</sup> Rumors began to circulate that DeKoning engaged in unorthodox means to convince contractors to hire only union tradesmen. There were reports that recalcitrant contractors would sometimes find their equipment vandalized, and there was speculation that DeKoning was either directly or indirectly responsible for the damage.<sup>57</sup>

DeKoning had moved to Long Island from neighboring Queens, and he knew that in New York City, business agents often met with workers in local taverns or halls where they could get together between jobs. As a former member of the Electrical Workers Union recalled, in New York City there were specific taverns where members of the various trades would meet. Functioning as a hiring hall, the taverns provided an atmosphere that was convivial, convenient, and supportive of a sense of brotherhood and solidarity.<sup>58</sup> One of DeKoning's first steps was to make sure there was a central location for workers in Nassau County. Following the repeal of Prohibition, Bill DeKoning opened a tavern in Island Park, where workmen could meet and mingle. A few years later, in 1935, DeKoning moved the tavern to Hempstead, naming it "The Place" because the town was "a more central location with fewer travel

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<sup>56</sup> "Bellicose Union Boss Held County in An Iron Grip," *Newsday*, May 13, 1953.

<sup>57</sup> Val Duncan, "The Bill DeKoning Story: Rags to Riches to ...," *Newsday*, Oct. 8, 1953.

<sup>58</sup> Richard O'Hara, interview author, March 15, 2015.



difficulties” for workers. The Place lasted only a few years before DeKoning converted it into a bingo parlor, but he reserved the second floor for union offices.<sup>59</sup>

To further build membership in local unions, DeKoning established ties with local contractors.<sup>60</sup> As Joe Fay’s protégé, DeKoning learned that one of the most effective ways to organize construction workers was to organize the contractors who employed them.<sup>61</sup> Among them were the Hendrickson Brothers, who owned almost all of the sand and gravel pits in the county.<sup>62</sup> Their connections ran deep. It wasn’t until the mid-1950s that Milton Hendrickson revealed that he regularly attended union meetings and even voted on matters concerning workers. DeKoning even permitted him to serve on the union side on a wage-bargaining committee, effectively allowing him to negotiate with his own firm.<sup>63</sup>

The Hendrickson’s were active members of the Republican Town Committee, and their close association with Nassau County party leader Sprague guaranteed them a continuous flow of lucrative building contracts. While DeKoning’s political affiliation is unclear, it was his relationship with the Hendrickson’s that linked him to the Republican Party. Simply put, DeKoning practiced transactional politics, supporting the party that engaged those contractors who hired union workers.

In 1935, there were two events that would permanently transform the politics of Nassau County. The first was the passage of the National Labor Relations Act, also known as the Wagner Act, granting collective bargaining rights to workers.<sup>64</sup> The second was President Franklin Roosevelt’s Executive Order No. 7034, establishing the Works Progress Administration. The WPA was created to “provide employment for needy employable workers” through “small useful projects” and to coordinate the

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<sup>59</sup> “Benevolent Bill: Barrooms for His Boys,” *Newsday*, May 16, 1950.

<sup>60</sup> Val Duncan, “Builders, Unions OK, Both Agree,” *Newsday*, Dec. 29, 1945.

<sup>61</sup> Hart, *The Last Three Miles*, 104; Garth Magnus, *The Operating Engineers: The Economic History of a Trade Union* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 38, 184; A. H. Raskin, “The Story Of Joe Fay: Labor Rule From Jail: A Career That Built Up,” *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1953.

<sup>62</sup> “Nassau Sand Pits Are Combined in \$500,000 Mergers,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 7, 1932; Burton, Hal, “The Sprague Dynasty,” *Newsday*, Oct. 29, 1954.

<sup>63</sup> “Hendrickson Admits DeK Union Votes,” *Newsday*, April 27, 1956. While it was widely assumed that Sprague “had a personal financial interest in the Hendrickson Brothers Contracting Company,” there was never any solid evidence. Caro, *The Power Broker*, 738.

<sup>64</sup> Joseph G. Rayback, *A History of American Labor* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1966), 341; Thomas R. Brooks, *Toil and Trouble: A History of American Labor* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), 170–171; Melvyn Dubofsky and Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America: A History* (Wheeling Illinois, Harlan Davidson, 1999), 258–261.

activities of the Works Programs.<sup>65</sup> Harry Hopkins, the national head of the WPA, aimed to employ “hundreds of unskilled workers wielding picks, shovels, and rollers to build its roads, instead of a smaller number of skilled, well-paid operating engineers who were trained to run steamrollers.”<sup>66</sup> To that end, he called for the elimination of prevailing rate on federal construction projects. His plan set off an immediate uproar from the building trades who saw it as a thinly veiled attempt to overturn the Davis-Bacon Act of 1931 and destroy union standards.<sup>67</sup>

In Nassau County, contractors affiliated with the Long Island Building Trades Employers Association took advantage of workers’ desperation for jobs, demanding a “voluntary” reduction in wages. If workers didn’t give up wages, the Employers Association threatened that they would begin to “operate on an open shop principle.” With unemployment growing and a new building permits down, skilled workers were faced with little choice but to comply. Painting contractors on Long Island went even further, unilaterally declaring an open shop and setting wages at \$1.00 an hour.<sup>68</sup>

In August 1935, the WPA opened offices in Nassau County. They reduced relief payments and announced that all of the funds would be administered almost entirely by the state. To add insult to injury, the WPA declared that projects would be directly supervised by the state. A month later, the WPA went even further when they announced that all hiring for construction and building projects would occur through the National Re-Employment Service.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Final Report on The WPA Program 1935–1943 Accessed:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2008/20080212001fi/20080212001fi.pdf> 7.

<sup>66</sup> Palladino, *Skilled Hands, Strong Spirits*, 93.

<sup>67</sup> William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 147; Palladino, *Skilled Hands, Strong Spirits*, 99; Final Report on The WPA Program 1935–1943. Accessed:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2008/20080212001fi/20080212001fi.pdf> III, 23. Although the earnings of WPA workers varied according to skill and location, they averaged only 54.33 a month over the 8-year period.

<sup>68</sup> “Building Unions DeNy Strike Ends,” *New York Times*, Nov. 10, 1934.

<sup>69</sup> “The standards of eligibility were set by the WPA, and the final determination of eligibility was eventually made a Federal, instead of a local, responsibility. However, the local relief agencies usually performed the real screening process, investigating and certifying the need of applicants and their suitability for WPA project employment.” District directors had flexibility in administering the program. Howe made it clear that there would be no local input in hiring. *Final Report on The WPA Program 1935–1943* <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2008/20080212001fi/20080212001fi.pdf>.8.

Their policies hit at the heart of the Nassau County Republican Party. County construction contracts went to politically connected construction firms.<sup>70</sup> Political loyalty was strictly enforced; contractors would openly “threaten to fire [workers] if they did not support Sprague.”<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the WPA also added a provision that called for all service and repair of equipment and the purchase of all materials to be requisitioned through federal procurement offices. “Local contractors,” said a WPA administrator, “would not stand a chance of making profits through the WPA.”<sup>72</sup>

Not only were local officials completely left out of the WPA plan, Nassau taxpayers were expected to provide over half of the necessary funding for the projects. And if that weren’t enough to raise the ire of Nassau Republicans, all of the WPA administrators on Long Island were registered Democrats.<sup>73</sup> In response, the Board of Supervisors could do little else other than to issue “vigorous protests,” and engage in a series of vitriolic exchanges with WPA authorities.<sup>74</sup>

For William DeKoning, the WPA’s actions reduced wages to levels below prevailing rate. He announced that building projects on Long Island would be blocked “unless those wage scales are suddenly boosted to union levels.” He claimed that he had formed the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council with a membership of 5,000 skilled tradesmen representing forty-four unions. The council, he said, had “recorded their unanimous determination to block employment at the minimum \$55-a-month wage.” DeKoning said that they decided that any union member affiliated with the council who accepted work for less than union scale “will be brought up on charges before the union [and that if] he is found guilty, he would lose his membership in the union.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> “Sewer Bond Issue Private Sale Sought,” *Nassau Herald*, Feb. 12, 1935; “Weston Gets Contract For Sewer Line,” *Nassau Herald*, Feb. 12, 1935; “5,000 Barrels of Cement in Sewer,” *Nassau Herald*, May 14, 1935; “Local Contractors To Build Wing,” *Nassau Herald*, June 2, 1936; “Spur of Road Work Starts in Lawrence,” *Nassau Herald*, Nov. 5, 1935.

<sup>71</sup> Caro, *The Power Broker*, 738.

<sup>72</sup> “Howe Reports WPA Rapidly Progressing,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 4, 1935.

<sup>73</sup> “Nassau ERB Director Gets WPA Office,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 29, 1935.

<sup>74</sup> “Fresh Burden On Taxpayers Arouses Board,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 6, 1935; “Nassau WPA Faces Inquiry Tomorrow: Littleton To Open Grand Jury,” *New York Times*, Dec. 8, 1935. Since Nassau County had a larger population than Suffolk, they apportioned the higher cost of service to Nassau County.

<sup>75</sup> “Unions Threaten To Block WPA Projects in Nassau and Suffolk Counties: Demand Boost Of Wage Scale to ‘Living’ Rate,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 19, 1935.

A group of workers calling themselves the Nassau County Workers Alliance also responded to the WPA by circulating a petition demanding that workers be paid wages “equivalent to union rates of pay and a 30-hour week on work projects.”<sup>76</sup> With protests increasing, a mass meeting was called by the state WPA director to be held in Mineola to explain WPA policies and answer questions from the public. Also invited to attend were Nassau-Suffolk WPA Director Howe and Hempstead Town Supervisor and Republican Party leader J. Russel Sprague.<sup>77</sup>

One of the issues for the building trades was that Long Island construction workers were paid less than workers in New York City. Before the meeting was held, the Valley Stream-Lynbrook Unemployed Association issued a call for Nassau County leaders to “join with union labor” to force the WPA to “pay Long Island workers equal to that paid to New York City WPA workers.”<sup>78</sup>

The building trades’ battle with the WPA was fodder for a political operative such as Sprague. At the meeting, he took labor’s side and cast himself as the champion of the workingman.<sup>79</sup> Addressing the overflow crowd, he attacked WPA operations and defended workers. He publicly commiserated with those who were forced to work on WPA projects fraught with “delays, lowering the wage scales of workers and boosting the cost of work relief for Nassau taxpayers.”<sup>80</sup>

Throughout the region, thousands of construction workers hit back at the WPA’s low wage policy. Because WPA workers were considered government employees, they did not have the right to strike.<sup>81</sup> Yet throughout the spring, summer and fall of 1935, workers in New York City participated in walkouts, strikes and demonstrations against the WPA.<sup>82</sup> Many chose to stay on relief and refused to take WPA jobs. New York City Mayor LaGuardia, who was generally sympathetic to the unemployed, warned

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<sup>76</sup> “Fresh Burden on Taxpayers Arouses Board,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 4, 1935.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. “Fresh Burden on Taxpayers,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.

<sup>78</sup> “Will Protest to WPA: Nassau Charges Unfair Treatment for the Unemployed,” *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 1935.

<sup>79</sup> Cox-Richardson, *To Make Men Free*. 168.

<sup>80</sup> “District Head in Personal Reply to Foes: Charge Wage Rate Talk Should Wait Until Jobs Relieve Unemployed,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 13, 1935.

<sup>81</sup> Final Report on The WPA Program 1935–1943. Accessed:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2008/20080212001fi/20080212001fi.pdf> 21.

<sup>82</sup> “Aide Calls Johnson Labor Foe and Quits,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* Aug. 28, 1935; “Painters Strike for Five-Day Week,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 28, 1935; “Low Relief Wage Banned By Unions: Conference of 125 Leaders Forbids Work For Less Than Prevailing Rate of Pay,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1935.

that any heads of families who shirked their responsibilities by collecting relief without work would be hauled into court.<sup>83</sup> The Works Progress Administration director in New York City, General Hugh Johnson, threatened to force recipients off of the relief rolls if they did not work. Johnson was vilified in the New York City press as anti-labor, and the head of the Labor Advisory Board quit in protest.<sup>84</sup> When William Green, the president of the American Federation of Labor, spoke about the WPA strikes in New York City, he could have just as well been speaking about Long Island construction workers. Green observed that workers in New York, “have been taught to believe in, to hold sacred and to maintain the prevailing rates of pay.”<sup>85</sup> Green was a Democrat, and criticism of his party’s handling of relief efforts bolstered Sprague’s assertion that the Nassau Republicans were better suited than the Democrats to oversee relief efforts.

New York State labor leaders were outraged over the WPA’s policy on prevailing rate. The president of the New York State Federation of Labor George Meany said that for a skilled worker to accept anything less than the standard rate would be a violation of the “most sacred rule of the trade union.”<sup>86</sup> He said that the federation was considering a state-wide general strike on all WPA projects if prevailing wage demands were not met.<sup>87</sup> Meany went so far as to say, “If I had my way there would not be any such thing as WPA or work relief... [t]he Federal money would be spent directly for public improvements by private contract.”<sup>88</sup> With Meany’s support, the Long Island Building Trades Council targeted every WPA project on Long Island, including the Long Island State Park Commission jobs.<sup>89</sup>

The support of state labor leaders and the continuous uproar in neighboring New York City over prevailing rate had an impact on Long Island. On Long Island, the WPA director ceded to some of the demands of the building trades by reducing working hours and increasing the \$55 monthly wage by ten per cent. But despite these adjustments, wages on Long Island were still lower than the prevailing rate

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<sup>83</sup> “From Dole to Work Relief,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 28, 1935.

<sup>84</sup> “Aide Calls Johnson Labor Foe and Quits,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 28, 1935.

<sup>85</sup> “WPA Strike Spread Expected by Green” *New York Times*, Aug. 13, 1935.

<sup>86</sup> Palladino. *Skilled Hands*, 94.

<sup>87</sup> “Labor Will Weigh State WPA Strike,” *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1935.

<sup>88</sup> “Threaten Strike on State WPA Jobs,” *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1935.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

paid to New York City workers. Union members and their leaders remained frustrated, allowing Sprague to continue his attacks on WPA inefficiencies, and to argue for local control of relief funds. The WPA director stubbornly stood his ground against Sprague's demands, saying that he would "make no concessions" to Sprague.<sup>90</sup>

The battle over the WPA's failure to pay prevailing rate reached its height during the fall of 1935 when the WPA finally relented by lessening the required number of working hours for skilled tradesmen while retaining the same level of weekly pay. The result of this change in policy increased wages so that they were close to union scale.<sup>91</sup> It also permitted the payment of prevailing rate in some instances and "authorized local directors to negotiate shorter hour requirements for the skilled workforce, compromises that ultimately brought relief wages more in line with union rates."<sup>92</sup>

Despite these adjustments, construction workers in Nassau County still earned less than those in New York City. The WPA defended the discrepancy, stating that Long Island wages were "as high as in any other county in the up-State area."<sup>93</sup> That excuse did little to assuage Nassau County construction workers. Prior to the founding of the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council, unionized skilled tradesmen on Long Island were affiliated with New York City unions; their expectations were New York City, not upstate, wages. DeKoning, who had moved to Long Island from Queens, understood those expectations.

The WPA director soon realized the issue of prevailing rate remained a volatile issue on Long Island. To divert responsibility from his office, he attacked the Board of Supervisors, blaming them for

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<sup>90</sup> "Nassau-Suffolk Snaps into Action Opening Way for 5,000 Jobs," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct 26, 1935.

<sup>91</sup> Final Report on The WPA Program 1935-1943. Accessed:

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2008/20080212001fi/20080212001fi.pdf>. 24. "Wage Compromise in WPA Expected Soon By Johnson: He Believe Hours Will Be Cut to Raise Average Scale Almost To Union Level," *New York Times*, Sept 18, 1935. The compromise was that skilled labor received a "security wage" of \$93.50 a month but the number of hours a month would be cut from 120 to 80. The result was an hourly wage of \$1.17. It was still below the prevailing rate, but constituted a "sufficient recognition of the prevailing rate principle to remove objections."

<sup>92</sup> Palladino. *Skilled Hands, Strong Spirits*, 100.

<sup>93</sup> "Howe Scores Nassau Officials," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 30, 1936. Wage rates were based on population density and level of skill. However, the rates were "flexible and provisions for modifications were made in Executive Order No.7046." Furthermore, "wage regions might be refined by the WPA at any time." *Final Report on The WPA Program 1935-1943*, 23. Accessed: <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015002348590;view=1up;seq=9>; "Nassau Officials for Failure to Submit Enough WPA Projects," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct 13, 1935.

failure to submit project proposals on time, leaving workers without jobs.<sup>94</sup> Their attempts to shift blame to local government fell flat when a short time before Election Day, DeKoning threatened a strike by Nassau County WPA workers unless wages between Nassau County and New York City were equal.

Fearful of how a labor action would impact voters, authorities quickly released a list of scheduled building projects that held the promise of more jobs. The announcement incensed Nassau Republicans, who called it a transparent attempt to try to “buy the election for the Democratic Administration.”

For the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades, the WPA’s attempt to distract them from their initial plans fell flat. DeKoning announced that Nassau County workers would strike and not work until “the prevailing wage rate for skilled labor was paid on all WPA jobs on Long Island.”<sup>95</sup> DeKoning reasoned that if Long Islanders were allowed to work at less than prevailing rate, then private sector contractors would follow suit. They’ll say, ‘Well, the men worked for the government at those wages, why can’t they work for us.’”<sup>96</sup>

The Long Island strike plan included parts of Connecticut and New Jersey. In New York City, the skilled trades promised that they “would go on a sympathetic strike to aid the Long Island workers.” On the day of the strike, “flying squads” of workers visited job sites on Long Island. Beginning in Mineola at the western end of the island, and moving east, the squads of strikers stopped at WPA projects and called “on all skilled workers to lay down their tools.” This marked the first time that a regional labor action was initiated by Long Island labor and not by the New York City Building Trades Council.<sup>97</sup>

On Election Day, Sprague was well compensated for his support of organized labor; he was overwhelmingly re-elected as Hempstead Town Supervisor.<sup>98</sup> The feared Democratic reforms to county government were routed by a vote of 41,492 to 27,507, while the far more acceptable Fearon Amendment

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<sup>94</sup> “Nassau-Suffolk WPA Ready To Call 5,000 To Work On Projects Tomorrow,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 27, 1935; “Howe Scores Nassau Officials For Failure To Submit Enough WPA Projects,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 13, 1935.

<sup>95</sup> State WPA Strike By Unions Loom,” *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1935.

<sup>96</sup> “Unions Threaten To Block WPA Projects in Nassau and Suffolk Counties: Demand Boost Of Wage Scale to ‘Living’ Rate,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 19, 1935.

<sup>97</sup> “Union Pushes plans For WPA Walkout,” *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 1935.

<sup>98</sup> Election Results in Borough, City, Queens and Nassau County,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 6, 1935.

was approved.<sup>99</sup> In December 1935, Sprague celebrated his victory by rewarding the party faithful. In what was described as a “G.O.P. Christmas,” Sprague played “the role of Santa to several party members deserving by shaking the political patronage tree,” and “handing out several lucrative jobs.”<sup>100</sup>

After the election, DeKoning continued to monitor WPA building projects while union complaints and demands continued.<sup>101</sup> DeKoning organized strike actions, and protesting workers walked off WPA projects. The Nassau County WPA Director claimed that only a few men answered the union’s call to strike, but newspaper articles covering the strikes contradicted his assertions.<sup>102</sup> Construction workers answered DeKoning’s call to strike, shutting down WPA projects all over Long Island. In November 1935, tradesmen working on WPA projects at Jones Beach, Bethpage State Park, and Meadowbrook laid down their tools and formed picket lines at WPA headquarters in Mineola.<sup>103</sup>

Even while “vigorously” denying the success of the strikes, the Nassau County WPA director was complaining to his superiors in Albany. He blamed construction delays and problems on the Republican Nassau County Board of Supervisors, saying that they were deliberately “lax” in paying for tools and construction equipment.<sup>104</sup> There was truth in Howe’s complaints. The WPA was responsible for the selection of the contractor on each project while the county was responsible for making the payment. Sprague described the arrangement as “undemocratic.” He claimed that county taxpayers were being asked to subsidize the WPA projects without the input of their elected representatives and that he was simply protecting the taxpayer’s interests.<sup>105</sup>

Closer to the truth was that the Board of Supervisors was deliberately stalling payments and often sabotaged projects.<sup>106</sup> But there were also real problems that could be attributed to WPA bureaucrats.

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<sup>99</sup> Boulay, DiGaetano, “Why Did Political Machines Disappear?” 35. The New Deal and the reform movement transformed the Nassau political machine. Smits, *Nassau Suburbia*, 69.

<sup>100</sup> “Jobs on the G.O.P. Christmas Tree,” *Nassau Daily Review*, Dec. 3, 1935. Sprague played “the role of Santa to several party members deserving by shaking the political patronage tree just before or after Christmas and handing out several lucrative jobs.”

<sup>101</sup> “WPA Officials Deny Threats of Strike,” *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1935; “Long Island Union Orders WPA Strike: 2,000 in Nassau and Suffolk Called Out ‘At once’ in Pay Rate Protest,” *New York Times*, Nov. 8, 1935.

<sup>102</sup> “Claims Differ In L.I. Threat of WPA strike,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 8, 1935; “Howe Claims Strike Burst Like A Bubble,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 9, 1935.

<sup>103</sup> “Victory Claimed in WPA Walkout,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 18, 1935.

<sup>104</sup> “Leader Claims 75 Walk Out At Jones Beach,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 16, 1935.

<sup>105</sup> “Nassau WPA Head Urges County Aid,” *New York Times*, Dec. 9, 1935.

<sup>106</sup> “Too Many Foremen Given Nassau Jobs, Says WPA Director,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 22, 1936.



Relief workers often had to wait five to six weeks before they received their pay. In Cedarhurst, right after the Thanksgiving holidays, their frustration reached a boiling point. One hundred fifty hard-pressed WPA laborers “stormed the relief office...and demanded food tickets and other relief because they had not received any pay from the WPA.” Questions about the delay were waved away by the WPA.<sup>107</sup>

### Fanning the Flames

As the WPA was fighting with construction workers, Sprague worked at directing the workers anger toward the Democratic Party. At a Republican committee meeting, Sprague accused the federal program of doling out jobs favoring members of the Democratic Party.<sup>108</sup> When the WPA director heard Sprague’s accusations, he became incensed, calling the criticism a “bloody outrage.”<sup>109</sup> Sprague took the accusations even further when in early December 1935 the Board of Supervisors of Nassau County convened a grand jury to investigate the management of WPA funds on Long Island.<sup>110</sup>

WPA administrators were summoned to testify in front of the grand jury. But they refused to sign waivers of immunity from prosecution and did not appear. The principal witnesses were Nassau County elected officials and State Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, a long-time friend and ally of Nassau Republicans as described in Chapter 1. Moses became a willing participant in the fight against the Democratically-controlled WPA. The year before, he had run for governor of New York on the Republican ticket. He suffered a humiliating loss, receiving only 35% of the vote, “the smallest percentage polled by a gubernatorial candidate of any major party in the 157 year history of New York

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<sup>107</sup> “WPA Chief Explains Cause of Pay Delay,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 30, 1935. “Each payroll first is sent to a timekeeper on the job to the district office, where it is checked and then forwarded to the finance office of the State Administration headquarters in Albany for rechecking. From there it goes to the accounts office in the branch of the United States Treasury set up in Albany for WPA purposes where it is again checked and then sent to the United States Treasury disbursing office in the same department where the checks are made out and forwarded to the district headquarters for distribution to the individual workers.”

<sup>108</sup> Republican Club Names Harry Smith,” *Nassau Herald*, Dec. 17, 1935.

<sup>109</sup> “WPA Head Hits Back At Critics,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 28, 1935.

<sup>110</sup> “Nassau WPA Faces Inquiry Tomorrow: Littleton to Open Grand Jury Investigation of All Phases of Unit’s Operations,” *New York Times*, Dec. 8, 1935.

State.” But Moses had good friends in Nassau, and he won the county by a little over ten thousand votes.<sup>111</sup>

The grand jury investigation lasted two weeks and issued no indictments. Instead, it published a seven-page report which confirmed Republican accusations of the WPA’s “great arbitrary discrimination in the matter of administering funds.” The report also cited the failure of the WPA’s bureaucracy to deliver paychecks in a timely manner. Because of this policy, WPA employees, left without means of support, turned to the county for funds. The county had to “provide these families with the necessities of life simply because, for some reason we do not know, those in charge of the WPA have failed and neglected to make the weekly payment to the men employed or engaged upon work relief projects.”<sup>112</sup>

The grand jury report also found that Long Island received only seventy per cent of the cost of relief in Nassau County while New York City received “100 percent total cost for all relief work.” This finding contributed to the ever-present ill will towards New York City harbored by Nassau residents. The report gave Nassau County officials “a clean bill of health,” and said that the county had submitted enough projects to the WPA to take care of all of the unemployed in Nassau County for a ‘considerable time in the future.’”<sup>113</sup> The grand jury report totally vindicated the Nassau GOP, helping to convince county residents that the Republicans were far better in administering to their needs than the Democrats.

The battle with the WPA not only united the Republican Party with the building trades, it helped establish labor as a strong political presence in Nassau County. DeKoning’s approach proved to be a success. The number of unionized trades had grown.<sup>114</sup> Following their fight, DeKoning was elected president of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Nassau and Suffolk.<sup>115</sup> His office, which he

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<sup>111</sup> Caro. *The Power Broker*, 209, 421, 430. Moses had a feud with President Roosevelt that dated back to the 1920s. “Detailed Results of Gubernatorial and Other Contests at the Polls,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 7, 1934; Rosenbaum, “The Political Consequences,” 63.

<sup>112</sup> “Nassau WPA Work Held Mismanaged: Grand Jury Presentment Admits,” *New York Times*, Dec. 20, 1935.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. “Nassau WPA Work Held Mismanaged,” *New York Times*.

<sup>114</sup> Lupinskie-Huvane and Singer, “The Great Depression,” 26–29; Tomlins, “AFL Unions in the 1930s,” 1022–1023.

<sup>115</sup> Bernie Bookbinder, “DeKoning: LI Labor’s Feudal Baron,” *Newsday*, Oct. 19, 1957. There are conflicting press reports about when the organization was founded. The Long Island Federation of Labor has a lectern seal with the date “1936” as the year that the Labor Council was founded. No one knows when the seal was made or by whom.

named it the “Labor Lyceum,” became the center of the AFL unions on Long Island.<sup>116</sup> Through these actions, DeKoning not only established trade union solidarity in Nassau County, he gained recognition as the spokesman for Long Island labor by AFL officials in Washington, D.C.<sup>117</sup>

### GOP Charter Reform

With the Grand Jury report behind them, the Nassau Republicans set out to prepare their own version of charter reform. Worrisome to the Republicans was that the recent Democratic reform propositions had been defeated by only fourteen thousand votes, which “was considerably less than the Republicans expected.”<sup>118</sup> This was exciting news for the Democrats, who interpreted the narrow margin of their loss as voters trending in their direction. Determined to stay in power, the Republicans realized that “we had to do a real job of getting a new charter or they would be back at it again...and we’d be on our way out.”<sup>119</sup>

Following the passage of the Fearon Amendment, the Republicans prepared their own charter revision plans to be considered by the voters.<sup>120</sup> Based on Reed’s study of 1934, the bill called for the creation of a county executive, allowed the Board of Supervisors to determine the design of county government, and guarantee that there would be little state interference in the design and operations of county government.<sup>121</sup> One month later, the proposal was approved by the legislature. The next step would be a referendum for county voters to approve or reject the Republican’s plan.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> “Benevolent Bill: Barrooms for His Boys,” *Newsday*, May 16, 1950.

<sup>117</sup> Magnum, *The Operating Engineers*, 184. As Joe Fay’s protégé, DeKoning fortunes rose with Fay’s. By the late 1930s, Fay “became a dominant figure in the New York building trades, and from there his influence spread throughout the labor movement and into the highest councils of the AFL.”

<sup>118</sup> “Charter Vote Spurs Hopes of Democrats,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 6, 1935.

<sup>119</sup> Smits, “Legislative Reorganization,” in *Contested Terrain*, 177.

<sup>120</sup> “Nassau Files Bill For New Charter: Measure Is First At Albany Under,” *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1936; “Charter Revision For Nassau Voted,” *New York Times*, Jan. 28, 1936; Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 68. During the 1935 elections, Republicans gained a 14 seat plurality to become the majority in the state legislature. “New Deal Slap Called a Myth,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 6, 1935.

<sup>121</sup> Thomas H. Reed, “County Government Reorganization,” *Legal Notes on Local Government* Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1936: 2. It was called the Thompson-Herman Bill for Nassau County. The bill became law in February 1936. Governor Lehman, a Democrat, reluctantly signed the bill, claiming that the reform measures didn’t go far enough. But Lehman was faced with a Republican legislature and realized that it was as good of a reform bill that he could get out of Republican Nassau County. “County Rule Bill Signed By Lehman,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1936; “League Approves County Reforms,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1935, 5; “Nassau Files Bill For New Charter,” *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1936.

<sup>122</sup> Shelland. “The County Executive,” 150.

The year before, Nassau Republicans had been hell-bent on defeating the Democrats' plan for county government reform. Now, they had to embark on a campaign to convince voters that government reform was necessary, as long as it was their plan and not the Democrats. The plan called for consolidating a number of governmental functions including property assessments, police, health, welfare, public works, and a district court system. At the same time they assured Nassau County residents that the cities, towns, and villages in the county would retain their structure and no "rash alterations in government" would not "be thrust down throats of citizens."<sup>123</sup>

To administer the new county government, they created a new office of county executive. It would be an elected position as the chief administrative officer of county government with broad powers of appointment for the newly-created county departments. To better control finances, revenues and expenditures would be centralized in a county budget with the county executive having line item control. The Republican plan also gave the county executive total control over all county purchasing and contracts. In addition, the county executive was authorized to appoint a treasurer. The new county government would also take on the enormous debt that the Board of Supervisors had incurred during the Depression, which by the mid-1930s was approximately \$54 million dollars.<sup>124</sup>

Zoning was by far the most politically sensitive issue. In the Republicans' reform plan, all zoning matters would be left to the towns, villages and cities to decide.<sup>125</sup> This was important, especially to the wealthy elite who had survived the Depression and still maintained their estates on the North Shore. The voting power of the Board of Supervisors, based on population, was left unchanged. The Supervisor of the Town of Hempstead retained most of the voting power.<sup>126</sup> Finally, because the new county departments needed workers to deliver services, the committee's recommendations included the establishment of a permanent County Civil Service Commission.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> John Crider, "Suburbs Pin Hope on Fearon Plan," *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1935.

<sup>124</sup> Shelland, "The County Executive," 146, 150. To pay for the relief programs that the county so generously provided to residents during the Depression, the Board of Supervisors had incurred enormous debt. By the mid-1930s, the county was carrying approximately \$54 million dollars in bonded indebtedness.

<sup>125</sup> "Nassau Files Bill for New Charter," *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1936.

<sup>126</sup> Shelland, "The County Executive," 151.

<sup>127</sup> Reed, "County Government Reorganization," 2.

At the New Year, the Republicans commenced the campaign to educate voters about the benefits of a new centralized form of county government. In early 1936, the Board of Supervisors completely eliminated the use of vouchers as part of the county's relief efforts. Instead, cash was distributed to residents. Sprague proclaimed this a "complete victory" for county residents collecting relief, and gave Sprague even greater recognition as a leader who shared the concerns of the people living in Nassau County.<sup>128</sup>

Sprague continued to attack the WPA, using it interchangeably with the Democratic Party. He demonized the Democratic Party, and accused the WPA of keeping "an enrollment book that shows what party a man seeking employment is identified with," and encouraged an "uprising against such tactics."<sup>129</sup> Attacking the WPA was only part of Sprague's formula of "votes, jobs and campaign funds" to build a political machine.<sup>130</sup> He also led efforts to form a "Non-Partisan Committee" designed to enroll new voters and to assist in the get-out-the vote efforts. Its' aim was to organize a corps of non-partisan workers in each village, register new voters, and get out the vote on Election Day." It's real purpose, however, was to make sure that Republicans went to the polls. The GOP also established a Young Men's Division, a veteran's committee, a businessmen's division, a women's division and a commuter's committee.<sup>131</sup>

### Taking on the State Party

In 1936, while campaigning for the passage of the county government reform bill, Sprague decided that the time was right for the Nassau Republicans to have a presence at the GOP national convention. The obstacle to his participation were the "old guard" members of the GOP. The old guard had been running the state party since the split between the Taft and Roosevelt factions of 1912. They ruled the state party apparatus with a firm hand, and it was they who decided who would become

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<sup>128</sup> "Nassau To Dole Relief in Cash," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 25, 1936.

<sup>129</sup> "Sprague Sees Primary Bout on Delegates," *Nassau Herald*, Jan. 14, 1936.

<sup>130</sup> James Munves, "Portrait of a Boss," *The Nation*, August 18, 1951, 128.

<sup>131</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 150.

convention delegates.<sup>132</sup> What they didn't know was that in February 1936, the moderate Republicans, including J. Russel Sprague, met to plan their ouster.<sup>133</sup>

To select the convention delegates from Long Island, state party leaders deferred to former state chairman and a leader of the Old Guard, W. Kingsland Macy, the Republican chairman of Suffolk County. Macy made it his practice to choose the delegates without input from any other party leader. But before Macy could announce his choice, Sprague convened his own meeting, without Macy, of Republican Party leaders of Nassau and Queens County. Following his meeting, Sprague sent a letter to Macy informing him that those attending had selected Sprague and the secretary of the Queens County GOP to serve as delegates to the national convention. Sprague's actions stunned Macy. He declared that Sprague was "in conflict with the time-honored custom of the past" and had committed "an unnecessary and pointedly unfriendly act."<sup>134</sup> Sprague ignored Macy's protests; instead, a primary election for the delegate seats was scheduled for April 2, 1936.

Voters turned out in droves to vote in the primary, with three times more voters casting their ballots in Nassau County than in Suffolk County. Macy suffered a humiliating loss; the Nassau County slate of convention delegates even won three towns in Suffolk County.<sup>135</sup> By defeating Macy, Sprague vanquished the Old Guard conservative wing of the Republican Party in Nassau County. It was an overwhelmingly victory, and as a reward, the party gave Sprague a seat on the State GOP executive committee.<sup>136</sup>

At the national convention, Sprague attracted attention when he used his political skills to stop "a possible stampede to Herbert Hoover." His actions assured the more progressive candidate, Alf Landon,

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 186.

<sup>133</sup> "County Chiefs Meet To Plan Eaton Ouster," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Feb. 25, 1936.

<sup>134</sup> "Nassau, Suffolk G.O.P. Split Over Delegates," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Feb. 2, 1936. Sprague's letter said that Macy was free to choose one of the alternate delegates (but only under the condition that the alternate that they selected remain uncommitted to any presidential candidate). "Borah Supporters in State Seeking A Primary Law," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Feb. 11, 1936.

<sup>135</sup> "Borah candidates Lose to Old Guard in State Primaries," *New York Times*, April 3, 1936. The results were as follows: In Nassau, Sprague, 24,992, Grau, 24,635, Randall 2,727, Hockert 2,526. In Suffolk, Randall 6,462, Hockert 6,491, Sprague 3,486, Grau 3,314.

<sup>136</sup> "State G.O.P. Names Sprague," *Nassau Herald*, April 21, 1936.

the nomination “a day ahead of its happening.”<sup>137</sup> Sprague, however, was not enthralled with Landon, and following the convention, he began to plan what would happen after the election. Sprague went on the “lookout for a winning contender, a candidate who could lend popular appeal to his own and to others’ efforts to retake the GOP for a kind of progressive conservatism.” It was during that time that Sprague was invited to the home of a friend and supporter of the Nassau GOP, a wealthy North Shore scion named Henry Root Stern. Stern introduced Sprague to meet an up-and-coming politician, Thomas E. Dewey. Dewey, a special prosecutor in neighboring New York City, was rapidly emerging within the GOP as a leader of the moderate wing of the party.<sup>138</sup> Their meeting, described as “genial and vague,” was a turning point for the political ambitions of both men. They shared an outlook of moderate Republicanism that included “keeping what was good about the New Deal but administering it better.”<sup>139</sup> Both rejected the anti-labor position held by the Taft wing of the Party and supported the National Labor Relations Act.<sup>140</sup> Dewey was friendly with the president of the New York State Federation of Labor, George Meany, as well as with David Dubinsky and Sidney Hillman, the leaders of the two large and powerful garment workers unions.<sup>141</sup> This was an especially important issue for Sprague. Many of the Nassau County Republican committeemen upon whom Sprague relied for political and financial support for the party were members of the building trades. It would be difficult and unlikely for Sprague to support a candidate who was a member of the anti-labor Taft faction of the party.

Even though he had little enthusiasm for Landon, Sprague and the GOP whipped up excitement around the presidential campaign.<sup>142</sup> A few days before the election, they held a rally in support of the Republican ticket at the Mineola Fairgrounds, which attracted fifteen thousand people. Marching bands blared as Sprague escorted the Republican gubernatorial nominee, William F. Bleakley, around the grounds, giving him what was called a governor’s salute. To inspire the throng, Bleakley made a speech

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<sup>137</sup> “Sprague Goes to Forefront in N.Y. Party,” *Nassau Herald*, June 16, 1936.

<sup>138</sup> Norton Smith, *Thomas E. Dewey*, 216.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* 221.

<sup>140</sup> Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free*, 210.

<sup>141</sup> Norton Smith. *Thomas E. Dewey*, 163.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* 219.

vilifying the New Deal, and warned the crowd that Tammany Hall Democrats were infiltrating the county through the WPA. GOP county canvassers going door-to-door visiting voters had discovered a Democratic conspiracy, he said. What they found was that “a great many persons receiving work relief have been told by New Deal party leaders and captains in the various districts that they, the New Dealers, had a ‘secret way of knowing how individuals cast their votes on Election Day’ and that a vote for Republican candidates would result in the loss of relief jobs by persons so casting their ballots.”<sup>143</sup> The only way to counter these threats, he claimed, was by voting Republican.

The results of the 1936 election, according to one scholar, were “disastrous for the GOP in almost all parts of the country, except in Nassau County, which stood out as a Republican stronghold.” Fifty six per cent of Nassau County voters voted for Landon, while almost sixty per cent of county voters cast their ballot for Bleakley for governor.<sup>144</sup> Though the Republicans lost statewide, Nassau County glistened as the one Republican bright spot in an otherwise dismal election year.<sup>145</sup> What was most important was that with each election cycle the number of votes cast for Republican candidates was rising. If the trend continued, the county would soon be in a position to determine who the party would nominate in state elections.<sup>146</sup>

Just as important, the Nassau Republicans won their measure for charter reform, though not by overwhelming numbers. Despite the party’s best efforts to “educate” voters, there were pockets of resistance from local leaders. They were fearful of losing the ability to control patronage and were reluctant to support any initiative that smacked of taking away what they considered to be home rule. Nevertheless, the bill was approved by the voters and was signed by the Governor in May 1937.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Craig Thompson, “Bleakley Scores Threat On Relief,” *New York Times*, Oct. 27, 1936.

<sup>144</sup> Rosenbaum, “The Political Consequences,” 63.

<sup>145</sup> Scarow, “Presidential Elections,” 71.

<sup>146</sup> Rosenbaum. “The Political Consequences,” 2, 63. The Nassau Republicans consistently delivered Republican pluralities from 1920 to 1964 for all state and federal candidates. The county delivered a mean of a mean of 63.4% for from 1920 to 1964 for Republican gubernatorial candidates.

<sup>147</sup> The vote was 57,267 to 37,024 with approximately 8,000 of those voting not casting their ballots for charter reform. It was only by through the strong support of Hempstead voters that charter reform was passed. Shelland, “The County Executive,” 158. Opposition to charter reform came primarily from the incorporated villages. The GOP used their old stand-by argument for charter reform approval: that its passage would prevent annexation of Nassau County by New York City. Smits, “Legislative Reorganization,” in *Contested Terrain*, 177.



Passage of the bill meant that Sprague could begin his campaign for County Executive. He crossed the county trying to convince voters to support the Republicans plan to reform county government. Just before the election, on a chilly, rain-soaked evening in the fall of 1937, seven thousand and five hundred Nassau County residents gathered in an “old fashioned” Republican rally at the Mineola Fairgrounds. Waving flags and shooting off red flares, the crowd cheered as two women riding an elephant led a parade of military bands and automobiles past the reviewing stand. Colonel Theodore Roosevelt Jr., the eldest son of President Theodore Roosevelt, introduced the main speaker at the event, the Republican candidate for County Executive, Sprague.<sup>148</sup>

Sprague won with sixty- eight per cent of the vote, becoming the first county executive in Nassau County. The provisions of the new county charter gave Sprague the “greatest concentration of power in local government than in any other American county.”<sup>149</sup> That same night, across the river in Manhattan, his new friend Thomas Dewey was elected District Attorney of New York County, routing his Tammany opponent by over sixty thousand votes.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> “Nassau Republicans Stage Rally In Rain,” *New York Times*, Oct. 30, 1937.

<sup>149</sup> John Gardner “Dewey’s Nassau County Boss,” *The New Republic* Oct. 4, 1948.

<sup>150</sup> “Sprague Swamps Alley As Republicans Sweep Nassau County,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 3, 1937.



### *Chapter Three*

#### *Nassau Goes National*

J. Russel Sprague was sworn into office in 1938. His new office came with “so many patronage jobs that no one in the county has been able to tell the number.”<sup>1</sup> To finance the operations of the party, Sprague imposed a one per cent annual contribution to the Nassau County GOP on the workers. Not only did the rule provide a steady and increasing flow of revenue, it meant that the party no longer had to rely on the North Shore elite for funding. Soon, Sprague’s control of Nassau County began to rival any urban political machine, including the much-despised Democratic Tammany Hall of New York City.

Sprague continued to enjoy the allegiance of organized labor and close ties with William DeKoning. DeKoning’s battles with the WPA had thrust him into the public eye, and following the Supreme Court’s 1941 decision upholding the constitutionality of the Wagner Act, he set out to grow his union base. Aided by his friends in the Republican Party, DeKoning organized workers throughout the county.<sup>2</sup>

Yet wartime expansion and aggressive CIO organizing required the alliance to adjust. Following the announcement by President Franklin Roosevelt that he intended to ask Congress to order 7,000 to 10,000 aircraft to build up the nation’s security defenses, the aerospace industry production on Long Island quickly expanded. Thousands poured into Long Island looking for work.<sup>3</sup> Organizers affiliated with the CIO soon followed, looking to unionize workers in the defense industry. Their aggressive organizing campaigns and focus on civil rights presented a challenge to the AFL and their Republican allies, putting at risk the partnership DeKoning and Sprague had forged.<sup>4</sup> For Sprague, the CIO presence

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<sup>1</sup> “Sprague Swamps,” Nov. 3, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> National Labor Relations Board v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation, 301 U.S. 1 (1937). Retrieved from: <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1900-1940/301us1>.

<sup>3</sup> In 1940, there were 406,748 people in Nassau County. By the end of the decade, the population was 672,765. Shupe, ed., *Population of Long Island*, 15; Rosenbaum, “The Political Consequences,” 1967. 26; “Population Survey 2006: Current Population Estimates for Nassau and Suffolk Counties and the Rockaway Peninsula,” Long Island Power Authority, Uniondale New York, Nov 2006, x; Preston R. Bassett, “Island’s Part in World Aviation-Part X,” *Long Island Forum*, (July 1950): 137.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Dray, *There Is Power In A Union* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 440–445.

raised the question whether workers would remain loyal to the Republicans or hew another path in support of the Democrats.

Nevertheless, the alliance survived. DeKoning and Sprague united to battle conservative politicians like Oyster Bay Congressman Leonard Hall. For Sprague, Hall was a political rival. When Hall began to vote with the conservative wing of the Republican Party, DeKoning convinced the CIO unions to join with the AFL in opposing him. Sprague and Hall united against Hall, each of them pursuing their own goals but finding a common enemy. When harness racing and pari-mutuel betting were introduced in Nassau County, Sprague and DeKoning entered into a financial arrangement centered on the racing industry in which DeKoning had the unilateral right to hire racetrack workers and organize them into unions he controlled.

By the end of WWII, both DeKoning and Sprague were at the height of their power. Sprague helped elect moderate Republican Thomas Dewey as governor of New York in 1942, and in 1944, Dewey, with Sprague as his co-manager, ran as the Republican nominee for President of the United States. He became a member of the Republican National Committee and was shaping state and national politics. DeKoning had organized thousands of new workers, neutralized the threat to his leadership of the Nassau County labor movement posed by Democratic CIO unions, and became the spokesman for all of organized labor on Long Island.

### A Force To Be Reckoned With

In 1938, New York State held a constitutional convention. Among the items approved as amendments was Article 17 declaring that labor was not a commodity, reinforcing the rights proscribed in the national Wagner Act of 1935.<sup>5</sup> It was encouraging news to William DeKoning, and he set out to expand the power of organized labor in Nassau County. The passage of the Wagner Act had already

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<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.dos.ny.gov/info/constitution/article\\_1\\_bill\\_of\\_rights.html](https://www.dos.ny.gov/info/constitution/article_1_bill_of_rights.html). New York State Constitution Article I, Bill of Rights, §17. Retrieved from <https://www.dos.ny.gov/info/pdfs/Constitution.pdf>; Gerald Benjamin, *The Oxford Handbook of New York State Government and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

encouraged the sand miners of Port Washington to organize. As one sand miner said, the Wagner Act “gave us the opportunity to organize” in the sand mines. “We went to the company and we said, ‘We’re organized’ and they didn’t believe us.” He continued: “I’ll never forget that day. We had a fellow running the train... and ... he just pulled a string and blew the whistle. Everybody stopped work. So then the company realized that we were organized.”<sup>6</sup> The sand miners joined an independent union, the Union of Steam Electric and Mechanical Engineers Local No. 1, and in 1937 negotiated a contract with the mine owners.<sup>7</sup> One year later, after the contract expired, William DeKoning challenged the independent union for the right to represent the sand miners.

A pitched battle between the rival labor organizations followed. DeKoning and his fellow organizers were attacked and beaten by the “sand men.” But DeKoning used his political connections and went to the Nassau County District Attorney to file a complaint. The Port Washington Assistant District Attorney Albert DeMeo issued a warning on DeKoning’s behalf to the independent union “not to start any more trouble.”<sup>8</sup> As the two unions continued to battle into the summer, the mine owners suddenly fired the 1,400 members of the independent union. Furious workers rioted in the streets, and the strike leader of the independent union was arrested. The next day, after spending the night in jail, the leader of the independent union suddenly changed his mind and announced he was supporting DeKoning. With his capitulation, the drive for an independent union fizzled, and a new union, Local 136 AFL, was formed for the sand bank workers.<sup>9</sup>

DeKoning unionized other workers as well. A unique opportunity arose when Nassau County Assemblyman Norman Penny spearheaded an amendment allowing harness racing and pari-mutuel betting at the state’s racetracks. Horse racing was then a popular sport, and there were several racetracks in Nassau County. Pari-mutuel betting eliminated the bookmakers, funneling profits from bets directly to

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<sup>6</sup> DeWan, George and English, Merle, “Making a Living in the Sandpits: Sands of Time Gone By,” *Newsday*, May 31, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Williams, “Sand Mining in Port Washington,” 37.

<sup>8</sup> “AFL Aides Beaten; Sand Men Warned,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 3, 1938. 20. A few years later, Albert DeMeo and DeKoning would become partners in the concession stand operations at the Nassau County racetracks.

<sup>9</sup> LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburbs*, 49; Williams, “Sand Mining in Port Washington,” 37. Local 136 was a directly affiliated local of the AFL; it was not part of any national or international union.

track owners and investors. Licenses to operate the racetracks would be limited and distributed by the state. The bill was the brainchild of George Morton Levy, a well-known criminal defense attorney in Nassau County, and associate of Sprague and DeKoning.<sup>10</sup> After Penny's legislation was passed, Levy became one of the first in the state to receive a harness racing license.<sup>11</sup> He formed a company called the Old Country Trotting Association; and to raise money for his enterprise, he secretly sold racetrack stock to politicians, including J. Russel Sprague and Norman Penny.<sup>12</sup> Levy's bet on harness racing took off, and he began to rake in enormous profits. Eager to make his own profits, contractor Andrew Weston acquired a state license and formed the Cedar Point Trotting Association.<sup>13</sup>

Politicians were the largest group of investors in the racetracks, but DeKoning benefitted, too. Levy arranged to give him "all of the hiring business at the track" and encouraged DeKoning to organize the workers into unions.<sup>14</sup> For the time being, the racetracks paid off for everyone. The arrangement between DeKoning and track owners strengthened the labor-Republican alliance, but as we shall see, would have enormous consequences for DeKoning and Sprague.

There was other evidence of DeKoning's deepening ties with the GOP. In the sand and gravel industry, employers were wary "of being caught between warring unions."<sup>15</sup> Early in his career on Long Island, DeKoning had developed a relationship with the Nassau Suffolk Sand and Gravel Producers Association. The depth of those connections was revealed during the spring of 1939, when DeKoning, the Hendrickson Brothers, and five other contractors in the sand and gravel association were indicted by the

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<sup>10</sup> Steven Reiss, *City Games: the Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 191-192; New York State Constitution Article 1, § 9 Retrieved from: <https://www.dos.ny.gov/info/pdfs/Constitution.pdf>. Retrieved from: <https://saratogainstitute.wordpress.com/2015/06/01/the-1939-pari-mutuel-referendum-in-saratoga-springs/>

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved from: <https://harnessmuseum.com/content/george-morton-levy>; Sam Goldpaper, "George Morton Levy," *New York Times*, July 20, 1977, retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/07/20/archives/george-morton-levy-of-roosevelt-raceway-is-dead-george-morton-levy.html>. The licenses for race tracks were limited to seven for the entire state. After Levy grabbed a third license, Hamilton Gaddis, "former assistant secretary to Dewey and a close friend of Sprague and Penny," decided that no further licenses would be issued. "Dream Track' Built on Rocky History," *Newsday*, Aug. 2, 1957.

<sup>12</sup> Reiss, *City Games*, 191. By 1953, thirty per cent of all Nassau County's Trotting Association stock was owned by politicians.

<sup>13</sup> Bernie Bookbinder, "Trot Scandals Show Pattern of Corruption," *Newsday*, Aug. 26, 1954. Sprague was accused of manipulating stock and Levy was Sprague's defense attorney. "Sprague On Stand in Stockholder Action," *Newsday*, May 29, 1942.

<sup>14</sup> Bernie Bookbinder, "DeKoning: L.I. Labor's Feudal Baron" *Newsday*, Oct. 19, 1957.

<sup>15</sup> Magnum, *The Operating Engineers*, 139.

Nassau County District Attorney on charges of bid rigging on WPA projects.<sup>16</sup> The contractors were accused of fixing prices, and DeKoning was charged with aiding them by threatening strikes against competitors who did not “line up.”<sup>17</sup>

The charges originated from a complaint by an independent sand and gravel operator whose business was in the middle of a strike action by the Operating Engineers Union. The attorneys who represented the men reflected their importance and the connections between the construction industry and the Republican Party. DeKoning’s attorney was Lorenzo Carlino, the Republican Party leader in the city of Long Beach; George Morton Levy represented the contractors.<sup>18</sup> The trial lasted only ten days and the defendants were acquitted of all charges.<sup>19</sup> Nassau was a Republican-controlled county, and it was odd that the District Attorney would indict men with such deep political connections. Following his acquittal, DeKoning made it clear that he was upset with the GOP for allowing the indictment by calling a strike on all Nassau County WPA projects, including a new \$2,600,000 Nassau County Court House.

Sprague was perplexed by DeKoning’s action; the entire project was being built by union contractors. Reporters were not so confused and in the articles they wrote, they speculated that the strikes were called by DeKoning as revenge for his indictment and trial. After two weeks, with no reason given for the cause of the strike, it was suddenly called off.<sup>20</sup> A few months later, in October 1939, DeKoning called for another walkout on all federal projects. Again, he “refused to discuss the reason for the strike.” Days later, he provided a vague explanation, saying that the strike was a “sympathy demonstration on behalf of county employees” who worked on federal projects but were not unionized.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Nassau Tries 7 In Price-Rigging,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 12, 1939. Hendrickson was a Republican committeeman and the former Republican mayor of the Village of Valley Stream.

<sup>17</sup> “WPA Price Rigging Charged In Nassau: 6 Concerns, 7 Executives,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1939.

<sup>18</sup> LaGumina, “A Half Century of Italian American Political Activity,” in *Italian Americans*, 53–67. From 1937 to 1943, Carlino was the Republican leader in Long Beach. His son, Joe Carlino, rose to become a key player in Nassau County Republican politics. Joe Carlino will be discussed in later chapters.

<sup>19</sup> “Nassau Jury Frees 7 Of Price Rigging,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1939.

<sup>20</sup> “Strike Ordered on Nassau Jobs: A.F.L. Leader Calls Walk Out Day After,” *New York Times*, June 24, 1939; “Strike Called on Nassau County Jobs,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 24, 1939.

<sup>21</sup> “Strike on PWA Halts Work on New County Courthouse,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 10, 1939.

What the strikes revealed was that a change in the balance of power between Sprague and DeKoning had taken place. When Sprague was asked about the strikes in the press, he was defensive, and said that the county had “no quarrel” with the union. “As a matter of fact,” he said, “we understand and are in sympathy with the objectives of the American Federation of Labor.”<sup>22</sup> As if to prove that the Republicans supported labor, when DeKoning decided to organize the waiters at a Mineola restaurant patronized by a large number of county officials, the Republicans “faithfully respected the picket line.”<sup>23</sup>

It was important that the Nassau Republicans maintain the support of organized labor. Election results showed that labor unions had become a key constituency in New York; Republicans who supported labor won elections. In neighboring Brooklyn, for example, Republican Robert Crews, who had “strong labor sympathies,” was the sole Republican to win during a Democratic sweep in 1938.<sup>24</sup>

Sprague showed his pro-labor sympathies in other ways. When the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) became involved in a dispute with the Long Island Lighting Company and its subsidiaries, Sprague intervened on the union’s behalf. At first, when the union threatened to strike, Sprague took a decidedly neutral stance. He issued a letter to both parties warning “that there can be no interference with the necessary service,” saying that “the county government will utilize every means available to prevent any interruption” of electrical service.<sup>25</sup> But as both sides dug in their heels and refused to budge, Sprague took “a hurried airplane trip to Washington” to see William Green, the president of the American Federation of Labor, to try to resolve the matter. While in Washington, Sprague “appealed to Mr. Green to exert his influence to help avert the strike.”<sup>26</sup> Less than two weeks later, the utility and the union came to an agreement. Sprague’s intercession with the national leadership

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<sup>22</sup> “Sprague Spurns Confab on Strike,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct. 12, 1939.

<sup>23</sup> “Bellicose Union Boss Held County in an Iron Grip,” *Newsday*, May 13, 1953.

<sup>24</sup> “13 New Faces From Long Island Will Be Seen in 1938 Legislature,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 2, 1938; “Crews Returns to Assembly Sole GOP Win,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 9, 1938.

<sup>25</sup> “L.I. Lighting Strike Voted By Workers,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1938.

<sup>26</sup> “L. I. Lighting Strike Put Off To June 22,” *New York Times*, June 10, 1938; Tomlins, “AFL Unions in the 1930s,” 1032.



of the AFL helped the IBEW to be recognized as the exclusive bargaining agent and confirmed his role as a supporter of organized labor.<sup>27</sup>

### Sprague Builds His Base

Sprague also made sure that he built support among unorganized workers, particularly those who worked in local and county government. In New York State, there were approximately 150,000 workers in the “44 counties, 900 towns, 500 villages, 8,000 school districts and several thousand improvement districts,” many of whom were hired by patronage.<sup>28</sup> Among reformers, the patronage system had long been recognized as having a corrosive effect on local government. As a state assemblyman, Theodore Roosevelt introduced a Civil Service Act. Its purpose was to root out the corrupt influences of patronage politics. In 1883, New York became the first state to enact civil service legislation.

Roosevelt wrote the law mindful of local concerns, and the law permitted counties to opt out of the state system and form their own civil service commissions. Nassau County selected this option, and following the establishment of a county government, three civil service commissioners were appointed. Their charge was to design job descriptions and administer civil service exams for all of the new county departments including health, civil service, planning and assessment, public works, a legal department, and a district court system.<sup>29</sup>

In order to get up and running quickly, they found it necessary to bypass civil service, and workers were hired on a provisional or temporary basis. The new hires came by the party machine, and soon it became apparent that the Civil Service Commission was not in any hurry to administer tests.

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<sup>27</sup> ““Lighting Strike On L. I. Is Averted,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1938; Terms Of Lighting Pact: Union Recognized As Bargaining Agent Under Agreement,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1938.

<sup>28</sup> “Frech to Sit In on Civil Service Talk,” *Newsday*, Oct. 8, 1940; Shelland, “The County Executive,” 88. In 1941, a newspaper story appeared that stated that low-grade civil servants were set to protest an ordinance giving salary increases only to higher-paid employees. The protest “failed to materialize” after the affected employees met with Sprague behind closed doors. While employees refused to divulge what Sprague had told them in the meeting, the story provides a glimpse into how the county conducted employee relations. “Supervisors Okay Pay Raises,” *Newsday*, Sept. 29, 1941.

<sup>29</sup> “Bill Would Widen State Civil Service Commission,” *New York Times*, Feb. 21, 1941; “New Court Set-Up For Nassau Urged: Government Revision Report,” *New York Times*, Dec. 31, 1935; “McClelland Heads Westchester Rule: Made Supervisors' Chairman As,” *New York Times*, Jan. 4, 1938. The law provide three options to county government: they could establish their own civil service commission, they could hire a county personnel director or county civil service could be directly administered by the state system.

Frustrated county workers waiting for tests and civil service status began to accuse the commission of “foot-dragging.”<sup>30</sup>

With the base of patronage workers expanding, Sprague introduced what became known as the “one per cent” rule. This was a rule in which local government workers hired by patronage would have to donate one per cent of their annual salary to the Nassau County Republican Party. It was an unspoken condition of employment, and party leaders insisted that the contributions were “purely voluntary” and not coerced in any way.<sup>31</sup> But workers were made to understand that contributing to the party was a guarantee for job security, raises, and promotions. Years later, even after public employees organized into unions and received civil service protection, the one per cent rule continued. Jerry Laricchiuta, the president of the Civil Service Employees Union CSEA of Nassau County recalled that when he started working in Nassau County during the 1980s, the one-percent rule was still in effect.<sup>32</sup>

This new source of funds quickly filled the coffers of the county committee with the added benefit that the Nassau County Republicans no longer had to rely on the wealthy North Shore for financial stability.<sup>33</sup> Because Sprague centralized all authority in the county executive’s office, there were “no decisions reached, no patronage dispensed and no bids accepted” without his approval.<sup>34</sup> What Sprague created was a solid structure that would later prove to withstand the test of time.

Sprague also centralized the operations of the Republican county committee. Committeemen were assigned to sell tickets to party fundraisers. Journals distributed at these events were full of ads

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<sup>30</sup> Arnold W. Gledhill, “Letter to the Editor,” *Newsday*, Aug 19, 1941. The writer left county employment because of its failure to provide tests and to give raises.

<sup>31</sup> Zander, Dick, “What the 1% Meant To the Nassau GOP, To Caso, to Politics,” *Newsday*, Aug. 9, 1985.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Jerry Laricchiuta. March 22, 2013. In his study of Nassau County during the 1960’s and early 1970’s, James Shelland credits the Republicans’ iron-fisted control and their adherence to “home rule” as key factors in their success at the ballot box.

<sup>33</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 102. Marjorie Harrison points out how Sprague continued to court the wealthy North Shore scions of finance and industry but was looking for alternative means of funding so he wouldn’t be “compromised” by their demands. In 1937, the GOP won control of all of the town governments in Nassau County, expanding the number of jobs available for patronage. “Republicans Keep Control In Nassau: Sprague Beats His Democratic,” *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1937.

<sup>34</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 151.

purchased by vendors and those who did business with the county. Anyone who received county contracts was encouraged—some would say that they were obligated—to buy tickets and ads.<sup>35</sup>

By the time Sprague joined the inner circle of Thomas Dewey's 1938 campaign for governor of New York, the Nassau Republican machine was humming.<sup>36</sup> A month before the gubernatorial election, Sprague put the power of the new organization on full display for Dewey's benefit. Sprague organized a campaign rally at the Mineola Fairgrounds for Dewey that was attended by over thirty five thousand people. As they streamed into the grandstands, they were feted by marching bands and roman candles. Over 90 Republican clubs from every corner of the county came to support Dewey, and they were whipped "into a frenzy of Republican enthusiasm" by Sprague.<sup>37</sup>

Dewey's opponent in the gubernatorial race was the popular incumbent Democrat Herbert Lehman. Dewey lost the election, but only by a little more than one percentage point. Because it was his first race for statewide office, the leading pundits of the day were impressed by how close he came to winning. They declared Dewey a shoo-in for governor in the next election.<sup>38</sup> His showing was so strong that he attracted the notice of a national audience, and a buzz began to grow within the national GOP for Dewey as a potential candidate for president of the United States.<sup>39</sup>

This was good news for Dewey but even better news for Sprague – a spectacular sixty-nine percent of the voters in Nassau County cast their ballot for Dewey.<sup>40</sup> While it wasn't enough to swing the state in Dewey's favor, it was a large enough margin to bring attention to Sprague, and there was talk that Sprague deserved a seat on the Republican national committee.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Hicksville GOP Party Set for Aug 29," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 16, 1936. The GOP expected more than 1,000 people at their event. Harrison, "Machine Politics," 102; Munves, "Portrait of a Boss," 128. Over the next fifteen years, the party spent close to one million dollars, a huge sum at the time.

<sup>36</sup> Rosenbaum, "Political Consequences," 227; Norton Smith. *Thomas Dewey and His Times*, 271–218.

<sup>37</sup> "Coalition Hopes To Get Sixteen State Offices Here," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Oct 26, 1938; "Dewey Off For Elmira After Nassau Ovation," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, "Oct. 27, 1938.

<sup>38</sup> Norton Smith. *Thomas Dewey and His Times*, 273.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 274.

<sup>40</sup> Rosenbaum. "The Political Consequences," 63.

<sup>41</sup> Harrison. "Machine Politics," 187. From 1920 to 1962, Nassau County Republicans percentage for the gubernatorial elections was 63.4% while the state Republicans produced an average of 48.4%. Rosenbaum, "The Political Consequences" 56; Norton Smith, *Thomas E. Dewey and His Times*, 307.

Sprague was cast as someone who was a “gifted” political organizer with a “natural expertness in reconciling conflicting viewpoints.”<sup>42</sup> With a “moderate sensibility,” Sprague sought out compromise and eschewed rigid, ideological positions, qualities that helped the Nassau Republicans achieve victory after victory under the long shadow cast by the Democratic Tammany machine next door.<sup>43</sup> Sprague also kept an eye on public opinion polls and designed campaigns with an “an appeal to Democratic and independent voters.”<sup>44</sup> He knew that to keep winning, the Nassau GOP had to maintain a moderate position and not cling to views for “some ideological end.”<sup>45</sup> Sprague was well suited to campaign for Dewey who had a similar “penchant for pragmatic politics,” and in 1940, he became co-manager of Thomas Dewey’s campaign for the Republican presidential nomination.<sup>46</sup>

The structure of the Nassau County GOP was systematized. In 1940, the Nassau County Board of Elections was divided into 302 election districts. These were geographical divisions of the county where residents would vote on Election Day. Each district had two Republican committeemen, locally elected by the Republicans living within the district. It is probable that at least fifty per cent of the over six hundred Nassau County Republican county committeemen had jobs with local or county government.<sup>47</sup> Similar to ward heelers or precinct captains within urban neighborhoods, Sprague made them responsible for recruiting new members to the party and getting out the vote on Election Day.

In Sprague’s political army, committeemen served as the eyes and ears of the neighborhood and formed the base of the political pyramid.<sup>48</sup> These “foot soldiers” reported to zone leaders who were responsible for several election districts. Zone leaders oversaw the committeemen and made sure that

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<sup>42</sup> Egan, Leo, “The Practical Men Around Thomas E. Dewey,” *New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1948.

<sup>43</sup> “Dewey’s Middle Way,” *Newsday*, Jan. 7, 1943.

<sup>44</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 187.

<sup>45</sup> Dennis Ippolito writes about how the Nassau Republicans provided incentives to new residents to join the party. Ippolito, “Political Perspectives,” 78.

<sup>46</sup> Norton Smith, *Thomas E. Dewey*, 311. Dewey supported the idea that government assistance and regulation was necessary, particularly during times of economic stress. He even became an advocate for the “expansion of unemployment and old-age benefits.” See Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 187 and McCue, “Thomas E. Dewey and the Politics of Accommodation,” 58.

<sup>47</sup> Ippolito, “Political Perspectives,” 39. Election Districts are government divisions with boundaries that were often drawn around neighborhoods. On Election Day, voters are required to vote within their own election district.

<sup>48</sup> Harrison describes the local committeeperson as the essential foundation of his “party pyramid.” Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 140, 150.

each patronage worker contributed the required one per cent to the party. Zone leaders were also members of the county party's executive committee and reported directly to Chairman Sprague.

The strict party discipline and demand for one-percent didn't go unnoticed. In 1940, the Democratic candidate for Nassau County district attorney accused Sprague of "boss rule" and of conducting a "Civil Service racket."<sup>49</sup> In the state legislature, Democrats introduced a bill that would provide civil service protection to town, village, and special district workers throughout the state.<sup>50</sup> Patronage workers were wary of the bill and feared that before it could be enacted, local politicians would have ample opportunity to wield a "political ax" against any employee they deemed disloyal.<sup>51</sup> The bill passed but it did little good for the employees in Nassau County. The county had its own civil service commission, precluding the state commission from offering tests. It remained business as usual in Nassau County.<sup>52</sup>

### The CIO Arrives

In 1938, Long Island was home to a small but growing aviation and defense industry. Approximately two thousand employees worked at the three largest facilities: Sperry, Grumman, and Republic.<sup>53</sup> But as the drumbeat of war grew louder, the number of contracts for airplanes and parts soared. In just one year, the Aero company one manufacturer of airplane engines added two thousand workers to its payroll.<sup>54</sup> Grumman Aviation, one of the first aerospace companies on Long Island, geared up for the war effort and began hiring between 1,000 and 2,000 new employees per month.<sup>55</sup> At Republic

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<sup>49</sup> "Mulry Hits Bossism Rule In Air Talk," *Newsday*, Oct. 25, 1940.

<sup>50</sup> "Rockland Accepts Civil Service Plan: County Is First In State To Act Under The Fite Law," *New York Times*, July 22, 1942. 17.

<sup>51</sup> "Mass meeting Asks Quick Civil Service in Villages," *Newsday*, Feb. 6, 1941. There were fears that it would be anywhere from six months to two year before the bill would not go into effect. "Ralph Hausrath and Frank Attwood Call Meeting on Civil Service Bill," *Newsday*, Feb. 4, 1941. They were eager to close this loophole, and in the winter of 1941, a mass meeting of two hundred village employees was held in Nassau County to petition the legislature.

<sup>52</sup> "Decision in Ricker Case Tomorrow, Says Judge," *Newsday*, May 1, 1941. "Village Officials Talk Civil Service," *Newsday*, Aug 11, 1943.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen Patnode, "Labor's Love Lost: The Influence of Gender, Race, and Class on the Workplace in Postwar America" (PhD diss., Stony Brook University, 2008), 29.

<sup>54</sup> Bassett, "Island's Part in World Aviation Part XI," 158.

<sup>55</sup> Patnode, "Labor's Love Lost," 48.

Aviation alone, the number of workers rose to 24,450 by 1944.<sup>56</sup> In just five years, between 1939 and 1944, the number of defense workers grew from five thousand to ninety thousand.<sup>57</sup>

As early as 1937, there had been efforts to organize workers at Republic Aviation by the AFL and the CIO. None of their efforts were successful because of what one newspaper article described as “lack of interest” among the workers.<sup>58</sup> The industry was still new. And before the war, many workers were hired through kinship networks or other “community based relations.”<sup>59</sup> Family connections proved to be an inefficient way to fill the employment needs of the industry, however, and management turned to professionalized personnel departments.<sup>60</sup>

At Sperry Gyroscope, workers were members of the Sperry Employees Industrial Association SHEA, a company union.<sup>61</sup> They had no collective bargaining rights, and their wages, hours, and working conditions were based on oral agreements.<sup>62</sup> Following the Supreme Court’s decision upholding the constitutionality of the Wagner Act in 1937, Local 1202 of the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE) launched an organizing campaign at Sperry.<sup>63</sup>

What followed was a long, protracted struggle between the UE and the company. Charges were filed with the National Labor Relations Board against the company union, claiming that it was dominated

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<sup>56</sup> Joshua Stoff, “Grumman vs. Republic,” *Long Island Historical Journal* Vol. 1, No. 2, (Spring, 1989): 114.

<sup>57</sup> Mollie Keller, “Levittown and the Transformation of the Metropolis” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1990), 208.

<sup>58</sup> Stoff, “Grumman Versus Republic,” 113. Republic was founded by Alexander Seversky in 1931. The company sold its first plane to the Army Air Corps in 1935 and by the next year sold seventy-seven planes to the Air Corps.; Bassett, “Island’s Part in World Aviation Part XI,” 160. In 1938 the company received its first international contract with Sweden. Two years later, Republic Aviation became a leader in the aviation industry producing high-speed fighter planes called the “Thunderbolt.” Stoff, 114. By 1944, the Farmingdale-based company became “the world’s largest maker of fighter planes” employing 24,450 workers in its facilities; McGill, Jogn, “Strike Looms in Aero Union Riff,” *Newsday*, Nov. 29, 1940.

<sup>59</sup> Patnode, *Labor’s Love Lost*, 40; LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburbs*, 217.

<sup>60</sup> Patnode, “Labor’s Love Lost,” 32, 49.

<sup>61</sup> Employee representation plans had emerged after a violent strike at Jersey Standard in Bayonne, New Jersey in 1915 and 1916. See Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker 1920–1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960) 66–189. In the Matter of Sperry Gyroscope Company, Inc. And Local No. 1202 'Of The United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers Of America, C. 1. 0. - Case No. C-19–32., Decided November 27, 1941. 1353. Retrieved from <https://www.nlrb.gov/search/all/036%20NLRB%20No.%20264%20SPERRY%20GYROSCOPE%20CO.%20V.%20ATL.%20LABOR%20REL.%20BOARD>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Sperry Gyroscope, 1354.

<sup>63</sup> NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp., 301 U.S. 1 (1937) in Robert Gorman, *Basic Text on Labor Law: Unionization and Collective Bargaining* (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co. 1976), 210.

In the Matter of Sperry Gyroscope Company, Inc. And Local No. 1202 'Of The United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers Of America, C. 1. 0. - Case No. C-19–32–, Decided Nov. 27, 1941. 1354. “The S. H. E. A. had no written contract, but the respondent and the S. H. E. A. did have an oral understanding governing wages, hours, and working conditions.”

and directed by management interests. The NLRB agreed and authorized a consent election.<sup>64</sup> During the weeks leading up to Election Day, Sperry management promised the employees that if the UE CIO were defeated, workers would receive a written contract.<sup>65</sup> Unable to counter the company's promises, the UE CIO lost the election.<sup>66</sup>

Undaunted, the UE CIO continued its struggle and again filed unfair labor practice charges.<sup>67</sup> In July of 1942, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the UE, CIO and granted the enforcement of an NLRB order requiring the Sperry Co. to dissolve the company union.<sup>68</sup> With the company union no longer an obstacle, the UE CIO once again commenced to organize Sperry workers.

During their protracted legal battle, however, circumstances for UE organizers, and unions in general, changed on Long Island. Company operations expanded, and the number of Sperry workers reached over sixteen thousand.<sup>69</sup> Sperry had consolidated its operations, and instead of smaller plants scattered throughout the metropolitan area, it had moved to a twenty-six acre plant in the Village of Lake Success in Nassau County.<sup>70</sup> Centralized operations were convenient for union organizers; it was far more efficient to speak to workers at plant gates in one location rather than traveling between plants.<sup>71</sup> At the start of their new campaign, UE CIO organizers were feeling confident. They had just won an election to represent workers at the Ford Instrument Company. There, the union had negotiated a starting wage of sixty-five cents an hour. At Sperry, the plant-wide minimum wage was only fifty cents an hour, and organizers were eager to share the news of their victory with Sperry workers.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Sperry Gyroscope 1354. The attorneys for the company assured Sperry management that "the new organization would be exactly the same as the S. H. E. A. except that it would have a new constitution and a new name."

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. Sperry Gyroscope 1360.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. Sperry Gyroscope 1362. The total number of 1,386 ballots counted, 529 thereof were in favor of the Union and 857 were against the Union.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Sperry Gyroscope 1364.

<sup>68</sup> "CIO to Seek Sperry Contract: Court Ruling Dissolves Former Plant Union," *Newsday*, July 7, 1942. Sperry Gyroscope Co. V. Natl. Labor Rel. Board, Circuit Court of Appeals, Second Circuit. 129 F.2d 922 (2d Cir. 1942). Retrieved from [http://www.leagle.com/decision/19421051129F2d922\\_1794/SPERRY%20GYROSCOPE%20CO.%20v.%20NATIONAL%20LABOR%20RELATIONS%20BOARD](http://www.leagle.com/decision/19421051129F2d922_1794/SPERRY%20GYROSCOPE%20CO.%20v.%20NATIONAL%20LABOR%20RELATIONS%20BOARD).

<sup>69</sup> "C.I.O. WINS IN POLL: To Be Bargaining Agency for 16,701 in Sperry Plants," *New York Times*, Dec. 24, 1942.

<sup>70</sup> "Debate Sperry Zoning Change: Sharp Dispute Marks Manhasset Hearing," *Newsday*, May 21, 1941.

<sup>71</sup> "Union Organizers Appeal to Lehman After Arrest," *Newsday*, Aug. 18, 1942.

<sup>72</sup> "CIO to Seek Sperry Contract: Court Ruling Dissolves Former Plant Union," *Newsday*, July 7, 1942.

For several weeks, UE organizers handed out leaflets at the plant gates when suddenly, without notice or provocation, authorities of the Village of Lake Success issued citations to the organizers, ordering them to stop soliciting workers. The village claimed that handing out written materials was prohibited by a local ordinance that banned the “distribution of handbills for anything but official business.”<sup>73</sup> Outraged, UE CIO organizers declared their constitutional rights were being violated and appealed to Governor Lehman to intervene. The governor, however, refused to respond, and it appeared that the organizers would have to answer the charges in court. Then, on the night before the hearing, all of the charges were suddenly dropped. No explanation was offered, nor was any legal decision issued.<sup>74</sup> With the charges withdrawn, union organizers once again began to solicit workers at the plant gates, this time without any interference.

It is unclear why the charges were dropped, but it is doubtful that the local authorities had a sudden change of heart. What is more likely was that there was an intercession on the union’s behalf to withdraw the charges by political leaders. At the time, there was only one man who had the political connections to get local authorities to back off the UE, and that was William DeKoning. As it happened, at the same time that the UE CIO was organizing, the International Association of Machinists (IAM) AFL had also initiated a campaign to organize Sperry workers, and DeKoning was an AFL organizer.<sup>75</sup> Once the charges were withdrawn, both unions were able to resume their organizing campaigns. The UE and the IAM gathered the required number of signed authorization cards for an election, and the National Labor Relations Board scheduled it for December 1942. The UE CIO won the election by a 3 to 1 margin, making it one of the largest local unions on Long Island.<sup>76</sup>

Following their victory at Sperry, the UE CIO approached management with a plan to hire more Black workers. This was a daunting task. The population of Long Island was generally homogeneous; the

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<sup>73</sup> “Union Organizers Appeal to Lehman After Arrest,” *Newsday*, Aug. 18, 1942.

<sup>74</sup> “Charges Withdrawn in Sperry-CIO Case,” *Newsday*, Sept. 11, 1942.

<sup>75</sup> “C.I.O. Wins In Poll,” *New York Times*, Dec. 24, 1942.

<sup>76</sup> “CIO WINS IN POLL: To Be Bargaining Agency for 16,701 in Sperry Plants,” *New York Times*, Dec. 24, 1942.



Black population was small, and would remain so over the next decade.<sup>77</sup> Training programs for jobs in the defense industry were designed to reflect the population, and were restricted to those already living on Long Island. The Sewanhaka Defense School, for example, trained 600 aircraft workers per month for Grumman Aviation, and only men from Nassau and Suffolk counties were accepted. Those from New York City could not attend except as a “last resort.” The director of the program reasoned that restricting defense jobs to those who lived on Long Island was necessary to avoid the “undesirable sociological problem” that the “importation of labor into Nassau and Suffolk” would undoubtedly produce.<sup>78</sup>

These were the conditions organizers “with roots in New York City” found when they began to arrive to Nassau County. They discovered that “the type of people employed in the plants of Long Island differ considerably from the people forty miles west in the vicinity of Greater New York.”<sup>79</sup> There was less tolerance than there was in New York City, and Long Islanders were less inclined to work with people from different backgrounds and ethnic groups.<sup>80</sup> There was no union tradition among industrial workers in Nassau County, and the rapid increase in the number of available jobs exacerbated this condition. If they were dissatisfied with one employer, “they were proud of being able to quit and seek employment elsewhere.”<sup>81</sup>

These restrictive policies reflected and reinforced the fear of outsiders already an integral part of the island’s history. As described in the previous chapter, native Long Islanders were wary of outsiders, and the arrival of Italian immigrants to the island coincided with the emergence of the KKK.<sup>82</sup> It was only with the advent of the Depression that the Klan faded as a political and social organization.<sup>83</sup> Yet during the 1930s, another racist organization had arisen. A large German-American population had settled in

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<sup>77</sup> In 1940, the Black population on Long Island was 3.6 per cent; over the next ten years, the Black population actually decreased to 3.2 per cent. Ibid. “Labor’s Love Lost,” 87, Table 1–4.

<sup>78</sup> “Turning Out Defense Workers,” *Newsday*, June 20, 1941. Established in August of 1940 by the Federal Office of Education, the training program was located at the public high school in Floral Park.

<sup>79</sup> Patnode, “Labor’s Love Lost,” 140.

<sup>80</sup> Justin Ostro, interview with author, April 29, 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Patnode, “Labor’s Love Lost,” 140.

<sup>82</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 113.

<sup>83</sup> Cavaoli, “The Klu Klux Klan,” 100–105. In 1923, the female section of the KKK “was chosen as the as the most popular organization in Nassau County.” And that same year, the Klan won elections in Islip, Babylon, Oyster Bay and Brookhaven and in 1924, it took temporary control of the Suffolk County Republican Committee.” Jackson, *The Klu Klux Klan*, 178.

Yaphank, in neighboring eastern Suffolk County, and they formed a club in support of Hitler and Germany's rise to power. It was "not just a Nazi or German organization; it was an American organization with local roots" – a German-American Bund.<sup>84</sup> On Saturday mornings, hundreds of children would board the Camp Siegfried Special from Pennsylvania Station in Manhattan bound for Yaphank. There would be outdoor activities and picnics, and Bund members held large and boisterous parades during which they marched down the streets of the town which were named after Hitler and Goerring.<sup>85</sup> In Lindenhurst, close to the Nassau County border, pro-Nazi marches and rallies were also held.<sup>86</sup>

But as the Germans and its Axis allies became more aggressive, the Bund and its Nazi adherents reduced their activities on Long Island and faded from the public eye. Nevertheless, like the Klan, the Bund's racism remained, and many in Nassau County continued to fear those whom the community considered outsiders.<sup>87</sup> The remnants of their racism contributed to a political conservatism and fear of outsiders that would continue to challenge the moderates within the Republican Party.<sup>88</sup>

Recruitment of defense workers from one of the five boroughs of New York City was made even more difficult because without a car, getting to the plants was difficult. Workers who lived off the island spent many hours on buses going to their jobs.<sup>89</sup> In addition, when a minority worker received a job, housing was difficult to find.<sup>90</sup> Neighborhoods were redlined by banks and real estate agents, restricting areas where certain ethnic groups and races were permitted to live.<sup>91</sup> Homes were sold with restrictive covenants that prevented the sale of a home to a minority. This practice continued even after the Supreme

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<sup>84</sup> Ryan Shaffer, "Long Island Nazis: A Local Synthesis of Transnational Politics," *Long Island History Journal* Vol. 21, No. 2, (Spring, 2010): 22.

<sup>85</sup> Shaffer, "Long Island Nazis," 20.

<sup>86</sup> Shaffer, "Long Island Nazis," 14. Also in Lucas Hanft, "Nazis on Long Island," *Long Island Historical Journal* Vol. 11, No.2, (Spring 1999): 225.

<sup>87</sup> Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*, 129. The racism and segregated housing has been long-lasting. In 2015, A Yaphank couple filed a lawsuit against the neighborhood association claiming that the restrictive covenant on their deed prevented them from selling their home. "The bylaws of the league, which owns the land in Yaphank formerly known as Camp Siegfried, restrict homeownership to residents who are "primarily . . . of German extraction." "Yaphank community built by German-Americans focus of subpoena," *Newsday*, Dec 15, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.newsday.com/long-island/suffolk/yaphank-community-built-by-german-americans-focus-of-subpoena-1.11231635>.

<sup>88</sup> Cox-Richardson, *To Make Men Free*, 195. Richardson demonstrates racist groups like the Klan influenced the ideological changes of the Republican Party.

<sup>89</sup> "New Bus Line to Sperry Plant Opens *Newsday*," *Newsday*, June 17, 1942.

<sup>90</sup> Joshua Freeman, *Working Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War Two* (New York, The New Press, 2000), 144.

<sup>91</sup> Baxandall, *Picture Windows*, 174–175.

Court outlawed restrictive covenants in 1948.<sup>92</sup> Homeowners and realtors continued to steer whites and minorities into separate neighborhoods. Facing discrimination at every turn, the Black population on Long Island remained low throughout the post-war years and did not increase until the 1960s.<sup>93</sup>

Initially, Sperry management resisted the UE CIO's plan to hire more Black workers. Supervisors expressed doubt and in some cases, rumblings and even threats of trouble from some groups of white workers." While Sperry's president, Reginald E. Gilmore had early misgivings about the CIO's hiring initiative, he announced that "average absenteeism and job separation is lower among Negro workers at Sperry's than among white workers and the performance of the average Negro is, on the average, equal to that of other employees." Union leaders noted that black workers were accepted by white workers and that twenty two out of three hundred shop stewards were black.<sup>94</sup>

In 1941, CIO Organizers launched an effort to eliminate Jim Crowism from the defense industry by forming the Council for Organization Against Discrimination. The Council's organizers, however, were based in Queens, not Long Island, and they soon realized that if they wanted to organize in Nassau County, they would have to put aside their emphasis on issues of social justice and civil rights and instead focus on issues such as pay rates and job classifications.<sup>95</sup>

Another successful organizing campaign for a CIO union on Long Island was the United Automobile Workers CIO (UAW) Local 661 at the Ranger Company.<sup>96</sup> There, the union negotiated a one-year contract, increasing the base rate of pay for unskilled entry-level workers from fifty cents an hour to fifty-five cents. The rate would rise to sixty-five cents after ninety days of service.<sup>97</sup> When the contract expired a year later, the local's president, James MacGilray of Massapequa Park, demanded a

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<sup>92</sup> Ippolito, "Political Perspectives," 21. In 1950, 97.4% of Nassau County residents were white and 2.6% were non-white. Baxandall, Ewen. *Picture Windows*, 174–175. The Federal Housing Authority, which issued the bulk of the mortgages in the swiftly growing suburb, waited until 1948 to officially stop issuing mortgages in restrictive communities. Keller, "Levittown," 225.

<sup>93</sup> Patnode, "Love's Labor Lost," 87.

<sup>94</sup> "Sperry Finds Negroes Competent Workers," *Newsday*, Aug. 7, 1941.

<sup>95</sup> Charge Discrimination In Aircraft Factories," *Newsday*, Jan. 31, 1941; Patnode, "Labor's Love Lost," 140, 138..

<sup>96</sup> McGill, John, "Strike Looms in Aero Union Rift," *Newsday*, Nov. 29, 1940.

<sup>97</sup> "Labor Set To Organize L.I. Airplane Industry," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Dec. 2, 1940.

starting hourly wage of sixty-five cents.<sup>98</sup> After several months of negotiations, the contract was settled and workers received a five percent increase.<sup>99</sup>

Following these successful campaigns, the CIO Industrial Council of Nassau-Suffolk was formed. The lead organizers of the newly established council were members of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, UE CIO, though its head was a business agent for the United Retail Employees Union Local 240.<sup>100</sup>

The CIO's organizing activity appears to have spurred the AFL-affiliated unions to organize defense workers. The AFL's United Aircraft and Scientific Instrument Workers of America, for example, opened its organizing headquarters directly across the street from CIO offices in Farmingdale.<sup>101</sup> While the CIO included issues like integrating the defense industry, AFL organizers emphasized bread-and-butter issues when organizing workers. When the International Association of Machinists AFL won the right to represent workers at two small plants, Liberty Aircraft and Erco Radio Laboratories, they focused on the need for job security, seniority rights, grievance machinery and job classification.<sup>102</sup> Their approach proved successful. AFL affiliates like the International Association of Machinists; the Metal Polishers, Buffers, Platers and Helpers International Union; and the International Molders and Foundry Workers Union of North America all signed contracts with the Columbian Bronze Company. The agreements included automatic wage increases and incentive plans to increase production.<sup>103</sup>

The rivalry between the AFL and CIO unions appeared to have been friendly: at least there were no newspaper reports of conflict.<sup>104</sup> This was particularly true during the war years. When union leaders called for a joint Defense Council, local AFL and CIO unions joined together to encourage union workers

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<sup>98</sup> "Strike Looms," *Newsday*, Nov. 29, 1940. The article states that the first year contract was negotiated in 1939 and expired one year later, in August, 1940. The local was a branch of Local 365 at the Brewster Airplane Company in Long Island City which is in Queens, not in Nassau County.

<sup>99</sup> "Washington's Urging Ends Ranger, Union Dispute," *Newsday*, Jan. 21, 1941.

<sup>100</sup> "Charges Withdrawn in Sperry-CIO Case," *Newsday*, Sept. 11, 1942; "A Labor Leader," *Newsday*, Sept 20, 1940.

<sup>101</sup> "Strike Looms," *Newsday*.

<sup>102</sup> "Republic Workers To Vote on Union Thurs.," *Newsday*, Sept. 16, 1948.

<sup>103</sup> "WLB Approves Bronze Corp. Wage Rates," *Newsday*, April 7, 1943.

<sup>104</sup> Dubofsky and Dulles, *Labor in America*, 291; Magnum, *The Operating Engineers*, 185; A. H. Raskin "AFL Men in Row over Racketeers," *New York Times*, Nov. 21, 1940; David Dubinsky and A.H. Raskin, *David Dubinsky: A Life With Labor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 159.

to step up production.<sup>105</sup> Individual unions, such as the International Hod Carriers, Building and Common Laborers AFL Local 66 and the United Retail Employees Union, CIO of Nassau and Suffolk, enrolled in a War Fund to help raise money for the Red Cross.<sup>106</sup> Local unions affiliated with the Central Trades and Labor Council, AFL set up a different day for their members to donate to the Red Cross blood bank.<sup>107</sup> Sprague appointed DeKoning to the Nassau County War Council, and in recognition of the CIO's presence in the county, Sprague later named ALP and CIO leader William Raben to the board as well.<sup>108</sup>

DeKoning made speeches urging all Long Island union leaders to do whatever they could to persuade their members to support the war effort. His exhortations promoted the public perception that labor was patriotic, enhanced his standing in the community, and reinforced his role as the leader of all of Long Island's organized labor not just the building trades.<sup>109</sup> This was in stark contrast to DeKoning's mentor, Joe Fay of the AFL Operating Engineers, who made headlines when he threw a punch at the leader of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, David Dubinsky, at the 1940 AFL convention in New Orleans. He justified the assault by saying that it was because Dubinsky was "one of the starters of the CIO."<sup>110</sup>

Other unions outside of the defense industry also began to appear in Nassau County. An AFL local affiliated with the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union held their meetings at a restaurant in Bellmore that was nicknamed the "Hub Club."<sup>111</sup> In the Village of Lynbrook, the Retail Clerks Union AFL Local 1500 of Greater New York organized a local union in several stores. They negotiated contracts in four stores with provisions that included "minimum terms of a 54-hour week, one week's vacation, granting of legal holidays, time-and-a half for overtime and seniority rights."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> "Local CIO, AFL Men Unite for Defense," *Newsday*, Sept 22, 1941; "AFL, CIO Unions to Form Defense Council," *Newsday*, Nov 5, 1941.

<sup>106</sup> "Schools, Stores, Unions Contribute to Red Cross," *Newsday*, Jan. 23, 1942.

<sup>107</sup> "Union Men to Give Red Cross Blood," *Newsday*, June 29, 1942.

<sup>108</sup> "Nassau County War Council Streamlined," *Newsday*, May 1, 1942.

<sup>109</sup> "Labor Leader Urges Workers 'Keep on Job,'" *Newsday*, March 31, 1943.

<sup>110</sup> Raskin, A.H., "Dubinsky To Press Racketeering Test," *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1940. The ILGWU left the CIO and re-affiliated with the AFL. Closer to the truth was that Fay assaulted Dubinsky because at the convention, Dubinsky had submitted a resolution that would compel unions to expel anyone identified as a racketeer.

<sup>111</sup> "Newsday Jotting," *Newsday*, Oct. 4, 1940.

<sup>112</sup> "Union Pickets 2 Lynbrook Groceries," *Newsday*, Aug. 21, 1942.

### Sprague and DeKoning's Pact

The growth in organized labor during the early years of World War Two did not go unnoticed by J. Russel Sprague. By 1942, his candidate Thomas Dewey, was elected governor of New York. In fact, the Republican Party made a clean sweep of all of the state offices, including Thomas W. Wallace of Schenectady who was elected lieutenant governor, the first time in seventeen years a Republican had been elected to that office. However, just eight months after he was sworn in, he died of pneumonia.<sup>113</sup> The state Attorney General determined that the vacancy should be filled by the next highest office-holder, Republican State Senate Majority leader Joseph R. Hanley. The Democrats disagreed and appealed the Attorney General's decision. The court sided with the Democrats, ruling that a special election would be held in November 1943.<sup>114</sup>

Both Republicans and Democrats anticipated victory in the special election. Their candidates for lieutenant governor were viewed as surrogates for Dewey and FDR. Dewey was planning to run against Franklin Delano Roosevelt for president in 1944, and the results of the lieutenant governor's would be interpreted as a sign of Dewey's strength. Sprague stated that the election would "serve as a barometer of the nation" and jumpstart the presidential campaign.<sup>115</sup> Democrats were optimistic too: they blamed their loss the previous November on divisions within their party, pointing to a faction loyal to the American Labor Party (ALP).<sup>116</sup> But in the six months following the election, they had resolved their differences and stood united against the Republicans, hoping to stop Dewey's presidential campaign in his tracks.

To counter the ALP in Nassau County, Sprague turned to William DeKoning and organized labor. But standing in the way of Sprague's efforts to unite labor behind the Republican Party was local

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<sup>113</sup> "G.O.P. Wins Complete Control of State," *Newsday*, Nov. 5, 1942; "Nassau Mourns Lt. Gov. Wallace," *Newsday*, July 20, 1943.

<sup>114</sup> Peter J. Galie, *Ordered Liberty: A Constitutional History of New York* (New York: Fordham, 1996), 271–272; "Lt. Gov. Issue May Go to Court: Dems Protest Ruling On Successor to Wallace," *Newsday*, Aug. 4, 1943; "Extra Election Challenges GOP: Sprague Says Election Will Test Dewey's Power," *Newsday*, Aug. 20, 1943.

<sup>115</sup> "Lt. Gov. Issue May Go to Court: Dems Protest Ruling On Successor to Wallace," *Newsday*, Aug. 4, 1943.

"Extra Election Challenges GOP: Sprague Says Election Will Test Dewey's Power," *Newsday*, Aug. 20, 1943.

<sup>116</sup> See "44 Straws in State Election," *Newsday*, Oct. 6, 1943.

congressman Leonard Hall. Halls' rise to power in Nassau County Republican politics coincided with Sprague's, and during the early stages of their careers, they were political allies. Leonard Hall was serving in the state General Assembly when he was elected to Congress in 1938. Once in congress, Hall moved increasingly in the direction of the conservative wing of the Republican Party. He voted against defense appropriations (which were bad for Long Island's growing defense industry), and in June of 1943, Hall voted to overturn President Roosevelt's veto of the Smith-Connally Act, otherwise known as the War Disputes Act, which banned labor strikes during wartime.<sup>117</sup>

Hall's support of the Smith-Connally Act incensed DeKoning as well as unionists in the newly-formed Nassau County CIO Industrial Union Council. Following Hall's vote, a delegation of CIO representatives went to meet with Hall at his office. While the main topic of their discussion was on racial discrimination in the defense industry, they also spoke with Hall about his support of the anti-labor Smith-Connally bill.<sup>118</sup> He brushed them off, insisting he was "all in favor of unions," but added that governmental restraint on unions was "necessary."<sup>119</sup>

A record of the CIO meeting with Hall, including a photo, landed on the front pages of the newspapers. A week later, DeKoning called for all of Nassau County's unions to form a Non-Partisan Political Committee. The committee's goal was to unite labor in endorse candidates who supported labor's agenda regardless of their party affiliation.<sup>120</sup> Its first foray into politics was to discuss Republican Congressman Leonard Hall's anti-labor votes in Congress.

DeKoning arranged for a mass meeting of Long Island labor, including the CIO unions, to discuss a plan of action. Over one hundred labor representatives, members of the AFL, the CIO, and the Railroad Brotherhood gathered at DeKoning's offices, the headquarters of Nassau-Suffolk Central Trades and Labor Council, AFL. At the meeting, DeKoning asked labor to work together not just to fight Congressman Hall but also to work towards the repeal of the Smith-Connally Bill.

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<sup>117</sup> "Labor Laws and Decisions" *Monthly Labor Review* Vol. 57 (August 1943): 305-307.

<sup>118</sup> Dray, *There Is Power In A Union*, 454.

<sup>119</sup> "Union, Congressman Don't See Eye To Eye," *Newsday*, Sept. 10, 1943.

<sup>120</sup> "Nassau Union Heads Join Hands," *Newsday*, Sept. 18, 1943.

Among the leaders attending the meeting were William Raben, Long Islander Joseph Malfetta who was the Queens representative of the UE, and Peter McLachlan, of the Transport Workers Union. These men represented the growing number of CIO-affiliated industrial unions in Long Island's defense plants. But they were also members of the American Labor Party. They engaged in a continuous battle to head the ALP in Nassau County, distracting them from achieving any kind of leadership within organized labor as a whole.<sup>121</sup> So when members of the American Labor Party offered party support for the new movement, DeKoning rejected their offer of help. Instead, he said, "We're starting as a non-partisan group," he continued, "and by George, we'll stay that way."<sup>122</sup>

William Raben agreed with DeKoning, stating that the fight against Congressman Hall was the "common ground" that they could all agree on and that any other partisan concerns should be set aside.<sup>123</sup> But by siding with DeKoning, Raben ceded a role for the ALP in the non-partisan organization. This was perhaps because the United Automobile Workers (UAW), CIO were involved in an aggressive campaign at one of the most virulently anti-union defense companies, Republic Aviation. By the fall of 1943, thirty per cent of the 15,000 employees at Republic had signed union authorization cards, and an election was scheduled for February 7, 1944.<sup>124</sup>

DeKoning was elected chairman of labor's new political committee. The other officers included Robert Forrester of the Building and Construction Trades Council and Joseph Pfisterer, President of the

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<sup>121</sup> The ALP, an outgrowth of the CIO's political arm, Labor's Non-Partisan League, was led by Sidney Hillman, a leader of the garment workers union. The power of the ALP was concentrated in New York City. The city was the most densely populated area of the state with a large number of industrial workers giving the ALP power to influence New York City and state elections. Mel van Elteren, *Labor and the American Left: An Analytical History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2011), 78; Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 376–377; Dray, *There Is Power In A Union*, 454; Matthew Josephson, *Sidney Hillman: Statesman of American Labor* (New York: Doubleday, 1952), 400. There were few members of the American Labor Party on Long Island. During the 1942 elections, only 393 ALP voters cast ballots in Nassau County. The election was a primary battle, one of the many continuous primaries waged by the handful of ALP affiliates for control of the Long Island branch of the party. Their time and energy was spent engaging in internal ideological battles for party control. The right wing accused the left wing of being "owned lock, stock and barrel by the Communist Party." During a 1940 primary election for the ALP congressional nomination, the vote for the two ALP candidates on the ballot was 60 to 36 in Nassau County for a total of 96 voters. "Edelberg Is Winner Of ALP Fight Here," *Newsday*, Sept. 30, 1940.

<sup>122</sup> "Nassau Union Heads Join Hands," *Newsday*, Sept. 18, 1943.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> "CIO Loses Republic Election," *New York Times*, Feb 9, 1944. Republic management went to great lengths to convince workers to vote against the union. They accused the union of communist domination but also used more practical tools at their disposal. Workers' salaries were raised, and the company initiated an "incentive bonus coupled with a 58-hour week giving employees 18 hours of time and a half pay." Their strategy succeeded, and the union was defeated.



Nassau-Suffolk Industrial Union Council. DeKoning announced that the committee would embark on a campaign to “organize the vote of workers in Nassau and Suffolk Counties to go out and elect men who will rally round legislation beneficial to labor” claiming that it would be “a long step toward a mighty voice for labor in Long Island politics.”<sup>125</sup>

A few weeks later, the committee met again to establish procedures and hold formal elections. Charles Wysong of the Railroad Brotherhoods attended and was elected as one of the other officers.<sup>126</sup> The organization now included railway workers, the building trades, and the new CIO unions, marking the first time that each segment of Long Island labor had united for a common purpose.

As the group’s spokesman, DeKoning’s rhetoric of being non-partisan was convincing. Even the name of the committee led members to believe that it had been formed with labor’s best interests in mind. It bore a striking similarity to the Labor Nonpartisan League, formed in 1936 by John L. Lewis, the national leader of the coal miners and head of the CIO. But the events that followed proved that, like Lewis’ organization, DeKoning’s committee was anything but non-partisan.<sup>127</sup>

Soon after the meeting, it became clear that while DeKoning claimed to eschew ideology, he had no intention of remaining non-partisan. Without consulting any other union leaders or members of the Labor Non-Partisan Political Committee, DeKoning delivered a telegram to Sprague endorsing State Senator Joseph Hanley, the Republican nominee for lieutenant governor, in the special election. The telegram was read by Sprague at a massive Republican campaign rally of fifteen hundred GOP faithful. The crowd cheered when they heard DeKoning’s words, declaring that “Hanley’s record was clear as a friend of labor” and his support “in line with our program of rewarding labor’s friends and defeating its enemies.”<sup>128</sup>

Following DeKoning’s endorsement, there was an immediate uproar. Three days later, members of labor’s non-partisan committee called a meeting to discuss DeKoning’s actions. From the newspaper

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<sup>125</sup> “Nassau Union Heads Join Hands,” *Newsday*, Sept. 18, 1943.

<sup>126</sup> “DeKoning to Head New Labor Group,” *Newsday*, Oct. 15, 1943.

<sup>127</sup> van Elteren, *Labor and the American Left*, 77–78. Van Elteren argues that the purpose of the LNPL was to help re-elect Franklin Roosevelt and to exert union pressure on the Democratic Party.

<sup>128</sup> “Hanley Relies on Women’s Vote: Cites State Labor Support At Republican Rally Here,” *Newsday*, Sept. 27, 1943.

accounts of the meeting, it appears that many more unions were in attendance than at previous meetings. Besides leaders of the AFL, the CIO, and the Railroad Brotherhood, there were the steamfitters and structural ironworkers, Sperry workers, members of the Teacher's Union and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, AFL.<sup>129</sup>

Charles Wysong of the Railroad Brotherhood criticized DeKoning, saying he failed to consider that "Hanley represented the Republican bloc in Albany—all of whom were on the record against the repeal of the bill" (the Smith-Connally Act). Wysong was clearly a Democrat, and understood the repercussions of Hanley's election on the 1944 presidential election. He warned the crowd that "if Hanley is elected, Dewey stands a good chance of being nominated for the presidency in 1944. That's forgetting that President Roosevelt is the best friend labor ever had." He further cautioned the group saying that "if the new Nassau labor organization expects to thrive, its various parts must stick together on the endorsement of a candidate." William Raben of the CIO agreed with Wysong's claim, and said that DeKoning's endorsement of Hanley did not reflect the political views of all of the unions in the new political organization. He suggested that instead of allowing DeKoning's endorsement to stand, the assembly should discuss the candidates and then vote on an endorsement.<sup>130</sup>

DeKoning defended his actions and said his telegram to Sprague was misconstrued as an endorsement of Hanley. Instead, he claimed that it was intended as an attack on Congressman Hall. He pointed out that the telegram had been addressed to Hanley and said that it included the message, "Hailing you, we condemn the anti-labor actions of certain of our National and State representatives," meaning Congressman Hall.<sup>131</sup> His praise of Hanley was to publicly shame Congressman Hall, and that the endorsement represented a "home run" for labor. Besides, he said, the New York State Labor Federation's Non-Partisan Committee, had endorsed Hanley, and he was simply following the lead of the AFL.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid. "Hanley Relies."

<sup>130</sup> "Labor Groups Hit DeKoning Endorsement of Hanley," *Newsday*, Sept. 30, 1943.

<sup>131</sup> "Hanley Relies on Women's Vote: Cites State Labor Support At Republican Rally Here," *Newsday* Sept. 27, 1943.

<sup>132</sup> "Labor Groups Hit," *Newsday*, Sept 30, 1943; "Hanley Relies on Women's Vote," *Newsday*, Sept. 27, 1943.

Surprisingly, DeKoning's convoluted arguments convinced the assembly. They ignored Raben's suggestion that they discuss the candidates and vote on an endorsement. Instead, the entire Hanley matter was put to rest and the group moved on to discuss their new constitution and by-laws for its governance. Newspaper accounts of the meeting observed that "at no time did the often-aired differences of the CIO and AFL break into disrupting factors."<sup>133</sup>

A few days after the meeting, Raben tried to undo labor's endorsement of Hanley by attacking Governor Dewey. In a newspaper article, he announced that "Dewey's record as far as Labor and reconversion are concerned do not warrant the vote of the people of Nassau County."<sup>134</sup> Apparently, his advice fell on deaf ears. In New York State, Hanley won the special election by 350,000 votes. His plurality in Nassau County was 67,930.<sup>135</sup> With no significant challenges to his authority, DeKoning was now able to unilaterally give out labor endorsements because there were. Endorsing Hanley and having that endorsement stand allowed DeKoning to stay true to his Republican allies and at the same time to become the de facto political spokesperson for organized labor on Long Island.

DeKoning had formed Labor's Non-Partisan Political Committee and had invited unions to join regardless of their affiliation. He recognized the growing importance of industrial workers, and he brought them into his political orbit. His actions brought him out of the back room and increased his power, propelling him front and center on the political stage. Four months later, the coalition that made up the original non-partisan organization dissolved. It was not, however, because of actions taken by DeKoning or any of the other unions on Long Island. William Green, president of the national AFL, asked that AFL affiliates "stop acting in conjunction with CIO organizations." When the next meeting of Labor's Non-Partisan Political Committee was held, there were no CIO members present—a fact that was ignored by DeKoning.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Labor Groups Hit," *Newsday*, Sept 30, 1943

<sup>134</sup> "Raben Hits Dewey Labor Record," *Newsday*, Sept. 21, 1944. As a left-wing member of the ALP, Raben's attack on Dewey was directed at right-wing members of the American Labor Party. "ALP Left Wing Seeks Own Committeemen," *Newsday*, Jan. 29, 1944.

<sup>135</sup> "Hanley Wins by 350,000 Votes: Other GOP Wins Cheer Opponents of New Deal," *Newsday*, Nov. 3, 1943. His Democratic opponent received 25,907 votes. "Large Nassau Plurality Helps Hanley Beat Haskell," *Newsday*, Nov. 3, 1943.

<sup>136</sup> "Laborites See Union Tax Hint in Bill," March 30, 1944.

It was then that DeKoning began to show signs of independence from the Republican political machine by challenging politicians' authority over hiring at a racetrack in Jamaica, Queens. Workers there were members of the Mutual Ticket Agents Union AFL, one of DeKoning's unions. They were considered temporary employees, hired through a system called "political sponsoring." At the start of the racing season, which lasted 180 days, local politicians would submit a list of people to DeKoning that they wanted to hire. These employees were not always dependable—some only wanted the job for two days a week for some extra cash. The problem was that the political hires would displace regular employees, "putting regular men out of work for that period."<sup>137</sup>

For two years, DeKoning tried to get rid of the system, and by the spring of 1943 he had had enough. He called for a strike on opening day of the racing season. Twenty-six workers walked out after the first race.<sup>138</sup> The strike and threats of further action were enough for DeKoning to win the battle, giving him full control over hiring of racetrack workers. After winning the strike at Jamaica, politicians who wanted jobs for their friends had to go through DeKoning.

Even Congressmen Hall recognized that DeKoning's rising power and influence. Soon after the establishment of Labor's Non-Partisan Political Committee, he asked to meet with DeKoning and labor leaders in order to "bury the hatchet."<sup>139</sup> Their meeting was conciliatory, and the Congressman pledged to support labor's issues in the future. This was a remarkable concession from a representative who had consistently voted with the anti-labor Taft forces in Congress.<sup>140</sup> Hall even went so far as to ask the group of labor leaders to provide advice and assistance to him when the country made the transition to a peacetime economy.<sup>141</sup> Their peace, however, lasted less than a year.

As the 1944 congressional election approached, DeKoning went on the warpath against Hall. Up to this point, DeKoning had never attacked a Republican politician. The Executive Committee of Labor's Non-Partisan League refused to endorse Hall for re-election. The league issued a six-page indictment of

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<sup>137</sup> "Jamaica Track Strike Looms," *Newsday*, April 5, 1943.

<sup>138</sup> George Currie, "The War: At the Front," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 11, 1943.

<sup>139</sup> "Hall, Labor Bury Hatchet, Seek Basis for Mutual Aid," *Newsday*, Dec. 23, 1943.

<sup>140</sup> "Labor Group Assails Hall's Record, Backs GOP Associate," *Newsday*, Sept. 30, 1944.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* "Labor Group Assails Hall's."

Hall, citing twenty instances in which the congressman voted against labor's interest. They stated that Hall "persistently has worked against this country's proper preparation for war and its subsequent moves in the conflict."<sup>142</sup> Just before Election Day, a full-page newspaper ad purchased by DeKoning, excoriated Hall's votes in Congress, blasting Hall for his failure to support defense appropriations and for continuously standing with the Taft wing of the Republican Party.<sup>143</sup>

Joining DeKoning in his anti-Hall campaign was the Nassau County branch of the American Labor Party Committee. ALP members distributed anti-Hall pamphlets, purchased anti-Hall ads in the local papers, and even borrowed DeKoning's language criticizing Hall's votes.<sup>144</sup> For his part, DeKoning was careful in his attacks on Hall. He made sure that his criticisms of the congressman did not extend to blaming the entire Republican Party, stopping short of endorsing Hall's Democratic opponent. Instead, he equivocated, urging voters to "vote for the man who will vote for your welfare."<sup>145</sup> As if to prove his loyalty to the Republican Party, he endorsed the Republican candidate for Congress in the neighboring first congressional district, leading one newspaper reporter to observe that this placed the labor movement in the unique position of "backing one Republican and fighting another."<sup>146</sup>

DeKoning's efforts to defeat Hall failed, and the congressman was overwhelmingly re-elected by a two to one vote.<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, by 1945, DeKoning's fortunes, and increasingly the fortunes of Nassau County labor, were inextricably tied to the Republican Party. As the party in power, the Republicans were in the position to make sure that construction projects were built with union labor. As the de facto labor leader on Long Island, what was good for DeKoning was good for labor. Hall, however, would not forget DeKoning's public attacks, and soon DeKoning would suffer the consequences.

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<sup>142</sup> "Labor Group Assails Hall's Record, Backs GOP Associate," *Newsday*, Sept. 30, 1944.

<sup>143</sup> "Our Congressman," *Newsday*, Nov. 3, 1944.

<sup>144</sup> "2d District," *Newsday*, Nov. 8, 1944.

<sup>145</sup> "Our Congressman," *Newsday*, Nov. 3, 1944.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* "Our Congressman," *Newsday*.

<sup>147</sup> Madeline Ryttenberg, "Form Sheet Shows How They Ran in '40," *Newsday*, Nov. 7, 1944.

## *Chapter Four*

### *The Alliance Survives Amidst Strife and Corruption*

In December 1945, “beneath the mellow light of crystal chandeliers in the Garden City Georgian Room,” five hundred members of the Nassau and Suffolk Contractors Association, leaders of the AFL building trades unions, and local politicians gathered “to break bread and pat each other on the back.” At the gathering, the men lavished praise on one another. Homebuilders applauded “labor leaders’ common sense approach and willingness to come to terms.” Contractors such as Arthur Hendrickson heaped compliments on DeKoning, while DeKoning complimented the contractor’s willingness to “settle our problems between ourselves—just labor and management, with no outsiders.”<sup>148</sup> They had built a good relationship, with enough benefits to satisfy all of them. But as they danced the night away, little did they realize that that over the next few years there would be profound changes in almost every aspect of life on Long Island.

The postwar period commenced with Sprague and DeKoning on top of the world. The labor-Republican alliance thrived during the massive economic and demographic transformations that took place in Nassau County in the postwar decades. Sprague directed Republican committeemen to fan out across the new suburbs. They offered government services, part-time and full-time jobs, and an expansive social network to draw recent arrivals to the Republican Party. DeKoning contributed to local charities and engaged in community functions, and became a pillar of the community. DeKoning’s status changed, however, when he told his union members to cross a picket line, beginning his rapid descent as leader of organized labor in Nassau County. Sprague faced challenges as well. His ill-gotten gains from his secret holdings in racetrack stock were revealed, leading to his forced resignation from the Republican National Committee.

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<sup>148</sup> Val Duncan, “Builders, Unions Ok, Both Agree,” *Newsday*, Dec. 29, 1945.

Between the two decades, much had changed: the moderate Nassau County Republicans were weaker though still dominant. The party survived the breakup of the partnership between Sprague and DeKoning and the downward slide of each of their careers. Sprague had lost his influence nationally though he remained powerful locally. DeKoning fell much further. He was hounded by attacks from his old adversary Congressman Hall, corruption charges involving ill-gotten racetrack gains and pursued relentlessly by *Newsday*. It could not have come at a worse time. It was at the height of the public's fascination with gangsters and racketeers, and the negative press and salacious headlines accelerated DeKoning's subjection to criminal investigation and public humiliation. The events of the postwar period would prove politically fatal for DeKoning. Nevertheless, he left behind a powerful labor movement that remained closely tied to the moderate Republicans.

#### Nassau County Labor and the Cold War

The onset of the Cold War called for additional defense-related airplanes, engines, and parts. With the necessary infrastructure and workforce already in place, the aviation industry was in a perfect position to compete for government contracts.<sup>2</sup> Skilled and unskilled workers poured into Nassau County to take those jobs, and over the next decade and a half the population of Nassau County doubled.<sup>149</sup>

In 1945, Nassau County was still a sleepy suburb. The majority of Long Islanders who lived there commuted to work in New York City. After World War II, thousands of New Yorkers flooded the county not just for the jobs, but also for the opportunity to buy their own homes. The housing stock in New York City was woefully inadequate to accommodate returning veterans eager to start their own families.<sup>150</sup> During the war, little new housing was built in the New York metropolitan area; and once the war was over, "there were virtually no homes or apartments for rent."<sup>151</sup> But on Long Island, there was

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<sup>149</sup> Shupe, ed., *Historical Population*, 1982; Richard P. Harmond, "Long Island As America: From Colonial Times through the 19<sup>th</sup> Century," *Long Island Historical Journal* no. 1, Vol. 1 (Fall 1988): 8; Shelland, "The County Executive," 59.

<sup>150</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Crabgrass Frontier; the Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 233; Keller, "Levittown," 208; Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*, 56–57, 87–88, 129; Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America* (Washington, DC: Brassey's Inc., 1996), 280–281.

<sup>151</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 232.

“lots of unused land and farmers ready to sell.” There were also “recently constructed highways, the Long Island Railroad, and families with wartime savings yearning for peace and prosperity.”<sup>152</sup>

The financing regulations at the Federal Housing Administration were changed. Almost overnight, billions of dollars’ worth of mortgage insurance was made available, placing home ownership within the reach of hundreds of thousands of World War Two veterans.<sup>153</sup> William Levitt, a contractor who began to build homes on Long Island during the 1930s, took advantage of these changes and began plans to build massive single family housing developments on Long Island. On what were once acres and acres of potato farms, vast tracts of suburban developments began to appear.<sup>154</sup> From 1940 to 1949, there was a 14.7 per cent increase in the number of homes built in Nassau County. From 1950 to 1959, the housing stock increased again by 35.8 per cent, and a total of 167,595 homes were built.<sup>155</sup>

The increase in defense industry workers changed the face of organized labor in Nassau County and introduced a shift in power between labor and the Nassau Republican Party. That relationship was personified by DeKoning and Sprague and was based on political and economic expediency. The GOP controlled the purse strings of local government. It was, as historian Grace Palladino points out, a “practical measure.”<sup>156</sup>

On the other hand, for industrial workers, a “continued flow of government contracts” was needed. The source of funding for these contracts came from congressional allocations in Washington, D.C., not from the County Executive’s office in Mineola.<sup>157</sup> It was the responsibility of Congress “to keep these contracts coming” so that their employers, the defense manufacturers, could stay in business.<sup>158</sup> In Nassau County, it was Congressman Leonard Hall, not Sprague, who could provide help and assurance that the contracts would be forthcoming.

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<sup>152</sup> Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*, 124.

<sup>153</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 233.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* *Picture Windows*, 126.

<sup>155</sup> “Nassau County Profile 2013: A collection of recent demographic, social, economic and agricultural data,” compiled by Jan Vink, assisted by Joe Francis, Sutee Anantsuksomsri, Nij Tontisirin, Johannes Plambeck. Retrieved from: <https://pad.human.cornell.edu/profiles/Nassau.pdf>.

<sup>156</sup> Palladino, *Skilled Hands*, 93.

<sup>157</sup> Shelland, “The County Executive,” 59.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* 26; John Gardner, “Dewey’s Nassau County Boss,” *New Republic*, October 4, 1948, 13.



As described in the previous chapter, both the CIO and the AFL competed to represent workers in the expanding sectors of the economy, and this trend continued during the postwar years. However, there were fundamental differences between the AFL and the CIO dating back to the creation of the CIO in 1935 that began to change after the war.<sup>159</sup> Organizers of AFL construction workers had built their success on the “bread and butter issues” of good pay, job security, and the closed shop.<sup>160</sup> CIO organizers, however, went beyond the issues associated with collective bargaining and included demands for social change.<sup>161</sup>

In the postwar era, AFL organizers realized that to successfully organize workers in the defense plants, they had to implement new strategies and broaden their views. In the defense industry, management often grouped workers by ethnicity, a move designed to stymie any sense of labor solidarity among the different groups. Managers at Grumman had Germans work in one area of a building while Italians worked in another.<sup>162</sup> The AFL’s International Association of Machinists, IAM responded to management’s strategy of ethnic isolation and used it to their advantage.

After a failed campaign by the UAW, the Machinists stepped in to organize workers at Republic Aviation, and hired an Italian-speaking organizer to better reach workers.<sup>163</sup> When it was finally held, in 1948, the union was defeated, but only by 94 votes out of almost three thousand.<sup>164</sup> Their narrow loss gave the union hope to continue organizing, with the belief that they would one day prevail.

After the war, workers on Long Island faced increasing political challenges. During the spring of 1946, Congressman Hall voted in support of the Case Bill that would have limited strikes. He justified his support of the bill by saying that it would be the first step in undoing the Wagner Act, which he called

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<sup>159</sup> Robert Zieger, *The CIO 1935–1955* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 14, 19, 23. According to Zieger, the AFL was used to drawing jurisdictional lines to organize skilled workers, and had difficulty in defining an approach to organizing a largely unskilled industrial workforce. Many AFL leaders were opposed to public social programs and mass activism. The ethnic differences between the largely western European AFL leaders and their immigrant CIO counterparts was an additional obstacle.

<sup>160</sup> Palladino, *Skilled Hands*, 91–112.

<sup>161</sup> Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*, 76–88.

<sup>162</sup> Patnode, “Labor’s Love Lost,” 84. Patnode states that the segregation of workers according to their ethnic background became unnecessary because workers began to self-segregate.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* 322.

<sup>164</sup> “Republic Workers Nix Union Second Time: Vote Close,” *Newsday*, Sept. 24, 1948.

“unfair and lopsided.” President Truman vetoed the legislation, after which Congressman Hall criticized the president, saying “the average man will deplore [the veto].”<sup>165</sup>

DeKoning, on the other hand, praised President Truman’s veto. But in a departure from his past denunciations of Hall’s anti-union positions, DeKoning refrained from publicly attacking the congressman.<sup>166</sup> Criticism of Hall came from union members associated with the American Labor Party (ALP), and from the local Communist Party. But both the ALP and the Communist Party had small memberships with little influence, and without any concerted opposition from workers, Hall was re-elected by a wide margin.<sup>167</sup>

Hall was just one of the many conservatives elected to Congress in the Republican sweep of 1946. Senator Robert Taft of Ohio emerged as their leader whose goal was to ferret out any left-wing influences on American institutions, including labor unions.<sup>168</sup>

Taft and the conservatives targeted the CIO. They vilified the CIO’s affiliates and leaders as communist or communist-dominated. As the political atmosphere grew increasingly toxic, the CIO “bent over backward to reassure the public that Communists would not be within its ranks” by expelling unions whose leaders expressed communist sympathies such as the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, replacing them with unions that passed an anti-communist litmus test.<sup>169</sup>

The hunt for communists in the ranks of unions eventually reached Long Island where CIO unions used it successfully to takeover UE Local 450 at Sperry Gyroscope. There, anti-communist local

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<sup>165</sup> “Hall Raps Truman Veto on Case Bill,” *Newsday*, June 12, 1946.

<sup>166</sup> During that election cycle, Hall received criticism from the Communist Party of Nassau and Suffolk who made a brief appearance on Long Island. They arrived “to help strengthen the political role and unite all sections of the labor movement AFL, CIO and railroad unions for progressive political action.” Seemingly unaware of the relationship between the building trades unions and the GOP, they published a broadside against J. Russel Sprague and “their Republican machines” for failing to provide progressive programs. “Reds Blast Politicos, Bosses,” *Newsday*, Jan. 16, 1946. The Communists found no support among ALP members. As early as 1940, the Nassau branch of the American Labor Party repudiated Communism, stating, “The A.L.P. of Nassau County repudiates all Communists anywhere and everywhere. That goes for the Communist Party as well.” “Nassau ALP Did Not Ask Red Ban Probe,” *Newsday*, Oct. 28, 1940.

<sup>167</sup> “Hall, Macy Triumph in Congressional Race,” *Newsday*, Nov. 6, 1946. Even though Harrison points out that Hall and Sprague had a long-standing rivalry, Sprague didn’t publicly work against Hall’s congressional campaigns. Hall was instrumental in getting support for Dewey in ’44 and in ’48 from his congressional colleagues. Both men needed one another so whatever bad blood existed was swept under the rug—for now. “Nassau GOP Delegation to Join Sprague’s ‘Draft Dewey’ Army,” *Newsday*, June 23, 1944.

<sup>168</sup> Cox-Richardson, *To Make Men Free*, 218.

<sup>169</sup> Dray, *There Is Power*, 505; Farber, *The Rise and Fall*, 29-30; Cox-Richardson, *To Make Men Free*, 218.

members friendly to the CIO launched a protracted challenge to the local's leadership.<sup>170</sup> They accused leadership of "communism, high-handed methods, and failure to account for monies."<sup>171</sup> It was unclear whether or not the internal struggle for leadership within the union was over ideology or power. What is apparent is that it was reflective of the times that union leaders were subjected to accusations of disloyalty and communist sympathies.<sup>172</sup>

Even AFL construction unions in Nassau County came under fire. In a front-page 1947 article in the *New York Times*, the Long Island Home Builders complained about the high cost of unionized construction labor.<sup>173</sup> This was far different than their cozy and mutually beneficial relationship with organized labor of just a few years before, when they had broken bread with politicians and construction union leaders. Adding to the growing anti-union animus was public resentment of government workers.

Labor actions by public employees were increasing, including work stoppages and strikes, causing disruption and hardship among the general population.<sup>174</sup> In response, Governor Dewey signed the Condon-Wadlin Bill in 1947, outlawing strikes by public employees.<sup>175</sup> Dewey had always been friendly to organized labor, but in order to gain conservative support of his presidential aspirations, he belied his moderate Republicanism and signed the bill at the same time as conservatives in congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act restricting union rights.<sup>176</sup>

### Crossing the Line

Labor was coming under attack from all corners, but William DeKoning was preoccupied with other matters. In 1940, he had purchased thirteen acres of land in Hempstead with the intent to build

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<sup>170</sup> Dray, *There is Power in a Union*, 504; "13 Union Chiefs Tagged as Communists," *Newsday*, Dec. 23, 1948.

<sup>171</sup> "Sperry 'Anti-Red' Group Meets," *Newsday*, Oct. 31, 1946.

<sup>172</sup> "Sperry Union Quits UEW for CIO," *Newsday*, Nov. 11, 1949. "NLRB Sets Hearing on Plea for Sperry Union Election," *Newsday*, Dec. 15, 1949. A referendum was held during the fall of 1949. Workers were convinced that their leaders were, indeed, communists, and they rejected them by a vote of 4,304 to 238. Immediately following the election, the officials of the former union submitted an application to join the Union of Electrical and Radio Machine Workers, CIO, putting an end to the United Electrical Workers union at Sperry.

<sup>173</sup> Lee E. Cooper, "Long Island Housing Slump Laid to High Cost of Labor: Building Slump," *New York Times*, March 14, 1947.

<sup>174</sup> Sumner H. Slichter, "To End Strikes In Essential Industries: Professor Slichter weighs six proposals to curb labor unions and protect the public," *New York Times*, Jan. 12, 1947.

<sup>175</sup> Norton Smith, *Thomas E. Dewey*, 474. "Vote of State Senate on Condon-Wadlin Bill," *New York Times*, March 12, 1947.

<sup>176</sup> "Mull Injunction in Phone Strike," *Newsday*, March 28, 1947.

union offices and a “place where union people can congregate.”<sup>177</sup> Construction jobs were always temporary, and the geographical distance between building sites necessitated a central location for workers to gather to meet with business agents to line up their next job as well as to congregate with other workers. He intended to build a meeting hall and gathering place that would also include unionized racetrack and industrial workers who had nowhere to meet other than the parking lot outside the plant.<sup>178</sup> Construction on the “Labor Lyceum,” as he called it, commenced in 1946; and a year later, in 1947, the union hall opened.<sup>179</sup> The Lyceum was an impressive compound, though it was hardly designed for the exchange of lofty ideas or philosophical notions. According to the news reports, the building consisted of union offices, a recreation center, a restaurant, and the longest bar in the county.<sup>180</sup> A photo taken at the grand opening showed DeKoning shaking hands with attorney George Morton Levy, both standing beneath the shadow of a looming statue of Samuel Gompers strategically placed at the entrance. At the opening of the Lyceum, DeKoning announced that his will guaranteed that upon his death, the “entire property would be converted into an old man’s home for union members.” Furthermore, he magnanimously declared, the profits from the restaurant and bar would be placed in a segregated account to be used for “new improvements” and to build the “home for the aged.”<sup>181</sup>

The grand opening was a cause for celebration with drinking and dancing. Among the merry-makers there was a local gossip columnist from the daily newspaper who noted that Joe Fay, DeKoning’s mentor from New Jersey was in the crowd.<sup>182</sup> Fay had risen to become one of the most powerful leaders in the construction unions on the east coast. By 1947, however, his fortunes had taken a turn for the worse. He had been convicted of extortion in 1943, and only an on-going appeal of his conviction was keeping him out of prison.<sup>183</sup> What was not known at the time was that Joe Fay held the mortgage on the

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<sup>177</sup> \$100,000 AFL Restaurant Play Center to Open in Uniondale,” *Newsday*, April 17, 1947.

<sup>178</sup> Freeman, *Working Class New York*, 144.

<sup>179</sup> \$100,000 AFL Restaurant Play Center to Open in Uniondale,” *Newsday*, April 17, 1947.

<sup>180</sup> Bookbinder, Bernie, “DeKoning: LI Labor’s Feudal Baron,” *Newsday*, Oct. 19, 1957.

<sup>181</sup> “\$100,000 AFL Restaurant,” *Newsday*.

<sup>182</sup> Jack Altshul, “Heads and Tales,” *Newsday*, April 23, 1947.

<sup>183</sup> A.H. Raskin, “The Story Of Joe Fay: Labor Rule From Jail: A Career That Built Up ...,” *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1953.

property.<sup>184</sup> His presence at the opening was only one line in the newspaper column, but over the next several years, much would be made of DeKoning's relationship with Fay, and the press would paint both men with the same brush of corruption and greed.

Once the Lyceum was open for business, DeKoning established what he called the Mule Club. All eight hundred and fifty members of the racetrack unions DeKoning controlled as well as the workers in DeKoning's construction unions were obligated to join.<sup>185</sup> Each Mule Club member was compelled to spend at least six dollars a week at the Lyceum's restaurant or bar. Attendance was mandatory and strictly monitored, especially during the winter months, and "anybody playing hooky wasn't rehired."<sup>186</sup>

The Labor Lyceum centralized labor's operations, establishing DeKoning as an important leader in the community. In keeping with his new status, he began to engage in charitable causes and became a generous benefactor, tying his union activities to good causes. A few months after opening the Lyceum, he held a picnic for union members, and twenty five hundred union members and their families attended, each paying an entrance fee. The donated funds, DeKoning announced, would go to a Christmas fund set up "for the needy."<sup>187</sup>

He and his wife established the William C. DeKoning Ladies Auxiliary Association to raise money for a local Catholic Church. The DeKoning's distributed food baskets to the needy, and hosted a Christmas Party at the Lyceum for 500 needy children and their families.<sup>188</sup> During the summer months, the ladies auxiliary held a pool party for the children of the St. Giles Home for Crippled Children. The local press published pictures of happy children frolicking in the pool at the DeKoning home—which DeKoning had built on the Lyceum grounds. He also established the William DeKoning Association,

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<sup>184</sup> Bernie Bookbinder, "DeKoning: LI Labor's Feudal Baron," *Newsday*, Oct. 19, 1957.

<sup>185</sup> John Gardner, "Dewey's Nassau County Boss," *New Republic* Vol. 119, Issue 14 (October 4, 1948):13–16.

<sup>186</sup> Val Duncan, "The Bill DeKoning Story: from Rags to Riches to . . .," *Newsday*, Oct. 8, 1953; "DeKoning Quits; Hint Probe On," *Newsday*, May 13, 1953; "Terror Years Forced Bill to Plead Guilty," *Newsday*, April 1, 1954; Bernie Bookbinder, "Held Trot Job While State Senator," *Newsday*, May 12, 1954.

<sup>187</sup> Jack Altshul, Heads and Tales, *Newsday*, Sept. 2, 1947.

<sup>188</sup> Nadia Dunkel, "Let's Look at Clubs," *Newsday*, Dec. 14, 1948; "Santa Brings Yule Cheer To 500 Kids at Labor Lyceum," *Newsday*, Dec. 26, 1947.

which contributed funds to charitable organizations.<sup>189</sup> DeKoning was elected president of the Nassau and Suffolk Youth Foundation, whose goal was to build a Boys Town in Nassau County.<sup>190</sup>

But as DeKoning's social standing increased, doubts about his loyalty to the labor movement began to surface, particularly around the building of suburban developments. The problems began in 1945, when the Levitt Brothers were building one of their early housing developments. The Levitt Brothers were notoriously anti-union, and built the homes using only non-union labor. DeKoning's immediate response was to have the Operating Engineers form a picket line around the project. The picketing went on for several months until one homeowner sought and received an injunction against the union. The union complied with the order but went to court in a lengthy legal battle for the right to continue picketing. After several months, the courts decided in the union's favor and restored their right to picket. Inexplicably, they never did.<sup>191</sup>

In 1947, Levitt embarked on his largest project, a massive suburban development of single family homes called Island Trees (which would later become known as Levittown) in Hempstead. Again, they hired non-union workers for the job, and again DeKoning had his union put up a picket line in protest. Construction unions had agreed to refuse to work on the Levitt project. Contractors, however, pointed out that the heavy equipment operators of DeKoning's local had already completed their assigned phase of construction. Unknown to the rest of the building trades, DeKoning then directed members of his union, the Operating Engineers, to cross the picket lines.<sup>192</sup> He never explained why he stopped picketing and failed to honor the strike of other construction workers. Years later, one labor leader recalled "There was always a veil of mystery over exactly what happened."<sup>193</sup> In *How the Suburbs Happened*, Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen write that the union protest against the Levitt Brothers happened once and

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<sup>189</sup> "St. Francis Benefit Opens at Mineola," *Newsday*, Sept. 27, 1948. The Levitt Family also contributed to the church.

<sup>190</sup> "DeKoning Heads Youth Group," *Newsday*, June 29, 1949; "'Boys Town' for Nassau Planned," *Newsday*, Sep 22, 1948. The Boys Town was never built.

<sup>191</sup> Bernie Bookbinder, "DA Calls Levitt on DeKoning Tie," *Newsday*, Oct. 10, 1953.

<sup>192</sup> *Newsday* Staff, eds., *Long Island: Our Story* (Melville, NY: *Newsday*, 1998), 416. "Union, Levitt Firms At Odds on Pickets," *Newsday*, April 18, 1950; "DeKoning Mum on AFL Reinstatement," *Newsday*, May 25, 1950; Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History*, 135.

<sup>193</sup> "DA Calls Levitt on DeKoning Tie," *Newsday*, Oct. 10, 1953.

then “petered out and died a natural death.”<sup>194</sup> In reality, Levitt sites were picketed on several occasions and there was nothing natural about DeKoning’s decision to halt the picketing.

The real reason behind DeKoning’s actions was revealed only years later. According to *Newsday*, when Levitt first proposed the Island Trees project, county officials blocked his plan to build homes on slabs instead of complying with local building codes that called for digging basements for the foundation. County Executive Sprague and Hempstead Town leaders had always demanded strict compliance with the codes. Their opposition to Levitt’s plan disappeared when a backroom deal that shuttled business to insurance firms connected Republican operatives was arranged.<sup>195</sup> The insurance business for the Levitt project was given to Norman Penny, a North Hempstead Republican committeeman and a close associate of Sprague—the same man who, while serving in the state assembly, had introduced Levy’s state legislation establishing pari-mutual betting.<sup>196</sup> The arrangement that the Republican leaders made allowing Levitt to bypass local building codes was unknown at the time, as were DeKoning’s business arrangements with GOP politicians at the racetracks.

While DeKoning and the county Republican’s benefitted from Levitt’s development, the rest of the building trades unions had enough. In May of 1950, declaring that he was guilty of “breaking labor’s cardinal rule—crossing picket lines,” DeKoning and Local 138A and 138B were suspended from the Building Trades Council.<sup>197</sup> “We will do better without DeKoning,” they said.<sup>198</sup> Replacing DeKoning as president of the council was John E. Long from the Bricklayers Union. Another “long-time foe” of DeKoning, Robert Forrester, became the secretary-treasurer. With DeKoning gone, construction unions flocked to the council, and by 1952 seventy per cent of all of Long Island’s organized trades had signed on as members with fifty three business agents, and thirty five locals in fifteen trades.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Baxandall, Ewen, *Picture Windows*, 128.

<sup>195</sup> *Newsday* Staff, *Long Island: Our Story*, 415.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* *Newsday*, *Our Story*, 415; Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 115.

<sup>197</sup> Helen Dudar, “Headlines Tell the Story of 1950,” *Newsday*, Dec. 30, 1950; Bernie Fisher, “DA Calls Levitt On DeKoning Tie,” *Newsday*, Oct. 10, 1953.

<sup>198</sup> “DeKoning Muscle Move On GOP Is Bared by Hall,” *Newsday*, June 8, 1950.

<sup>199</sup> Bernie Fisher, “DA Calls Levitt On DeKoning Tie,” *Newsday*, Oct. 10, 1953; “DeKoning Power Grab Nears Showdown,” *Newsday*, Jan. 24, 1952.

Following the change of leadership, the Building Trades Council “declared war” on the Levitt projects and set up a picket line around the model homes. But it was too late. The homes built by Levitt & Sons on Long Island proved to be enormously popular with the public. During one weekend, 18,000 eager potential homeowners came to see Levitt’s model homes.<sup>200</sup> Years later, DeKoning’s nephew lamented that crossing the picket line, “was the most drastic action that he (DeKoning) could deal to labor.”<sup>201</sup> A year later, DeKoning local was permitted to rejoin the Nassau Suffolk-Building Trades Council, but only as a member. He never regained power over the council, but because he remained president of his local, he was able to continue to wield power over construction projects.

### The Political Challenge of the Suburbs

While Sprague was most likely aware of DeKoning’s troubles, he was busy modernizing the Republican machine and attracting newcomers to the Party. The population was dramatically increasing. There had been smaller waves of New York City residents, mostly from Brooklyn or Queens, who had moved to Long Island during the 1930s. But even then, the population of the entire county remained around three hundred thousand.<sup>202</sup>

The GOP had always warned Nassau voters that hordes of city dwellers would bring their Tammany Democratic ways with them. Sprague worried that with on-going economic expansion, “Long Island would be flooded by veterans from New York City who might be Democrats.”<sup>203</sup> Post-war registration confirmed Sprague’s fears.<sup>204</sup> There was an alarming uptick in the number of Democratic registrations.<sup>205</sup> The returns revealed that “eighty-two percent of the Democrats who have moved into the

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<sup>200</sup> Beryl Howell, “18,000 Throng Levittown ‘Building Museum,’ ‘50’ Home,” *Newsday*, April 24, 1950.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. 416.

<sup>202</sup> Keller, “Levittown,” 197-202, 225. In 1940, “46.7% came from Queens, 18.9% from Brooklyn, 4.9% from the Bronx, 3.3% from Manhattan. “Survey Reveals Shift to Manhattan” *Newsday*, Sept. 30, 1940. 18.

<sup>203</sup> Baxandall and Ewen. *Picture Windows*, 129.

<sup>204</sup> Keller, “Levittown,” 225. In 1940, of those moving to Nassau County, “46.7% came from Queens, 18.9% from Brooklyn, 4.9% from the Bronx, 3.3% from Manhattan. “Survey Reveals Shift to Manhattan” *Newsday*, Sept. 30, 1940. 18.

<sup>205</sup> “Of all the new voters who chose to enroll in a political party between 1945 and 1961, almost half chose the Democratic Party.” Shelland, “The County Executive,” 103.



county” came from New York City.<sup>206</sup> Before the 1948 presidential election voter registration increased by eleven per cent. In Levittown alone, “where a city-sized development sprung up in the space of a year, 4,064 [voters] registered.”<sup>207</sup> In the twenty years following World War Two, the number of registered voters in Nassau County increased by over one hundred sixty five per cent.<sup>208</sup>

Democratic Party leaders, of course, were delighted.<sup>209</sup> During the post-war period, there was much speculation about how the new suburban population would vote. Many assumed that voters moving to the suburbs would automatically join the Republican Party. But as one observer at the time noted, “not everyone who has come to Long Island to live since the war is a Republican refugee, a D.P. from Democratic territory.”<sup>210</sup> Sprague realized that without an effective response from the party, it was just a matter of time before the influx of New York City residents would lead to a total loss of power by the Nassau Republicans.<sup>211</sup>

New residents, particularly those moving from the city, often found that the suburbs could be isolating. Sprague dispatched GOP committeemen to visit their new neighbors in their homes. He developed “a methodical community outreach, block-by-block, and house-by-house.” They served as the community “welcome wagon,” whose job it was to provide their new neighbors with “information about stores, schools and babysitters.”<sup>212</sup> The committeemen successfully replaced politics and ideology with personal relationships, and as the social network grew, the Republican Party became the center of a new suburban identity.

The committeemen also offered a practical aspect to joining the Republican Party; it was the way new homeowners were assured of securing needed municipal services. Sprague established a direct line of

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<sup>206</sup> Ippolito, “Political Perspectives,” 55.

<sup>207</sup> “332,469 Register To Set Nassau Record; 11 Per Cent Over 44,” *Newsday*, Oct. 11, 1948.

<sup>208</sup> Rosenbaum, “The Political Consequences,” 93. In comparison, electoral growth in New York State for the same period was 13.7% and in the United States it was 44.6%. Ippolito “Political Perspectives and Party Leadership,” 25.

<sup>209</sup> Leo P. Hanning, “Probe Levittown Registration Charges,” *Newsday*, Oct. 18, 1949.

<sup>210</sup> “Republican Renaissance,” *Newsday*, Nov. 10, 1949.

<sup>211</sup> Rosenbaum, “Political Consequences,” 30, 227, 228. Rosenbaum postulates that Jews and Catholics that moved to the county during the postwar period didn’t change their views. Justin Ostro said that people moving to Long Island from New York City during the postwar period “registered Republican but voted Democrat.” Justin Ostro interview by author, April 29, 2015.

<sup>212</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 150, 152.

communication between local government representatives and GOP committeemen so that they could quickly solve local problems. They could get traffic lights installed at dangerous corners, make sure the trash was picked up, and keep the streets plowed during the winter. Residents relied on their local committeemen to provide services and answers to all of their questions and concerns about life in the suburbs. In exchange, those who “promised to vote Republican were almost always assured of having their traffic tickets fixed and of being able to avoid jury duty.”<sup>213</sup> The local Republicans presented a unified structure for newcomers confused by the hodgepodge of local government structure.<sup>214</sup> Theirs was not an ideological message but a practical one, using common interests rather than exploiting a divide.

The sheer number of new arrivals precluded committeemen from knocking on every door. To reach voters, the party introduced more modern methods to influence voters. Instead of passing out flyers with crude sketches of inner-city Democratic bogey-men as they had done in the past, they began to rely on sending postcards depicting photographs of dirty, dingy and over-crowded Queens neighborhoods juxtaposed next to the clean, welcoming suburban developments. These were printed on glossy paper and mailed to the homes in the new developments.

The pictures had an impact; one present-day Republican zone leader recalls these mailers arriving at his home while he was growing up in Levittown. The message that he gleaned from the pictures was that if his family failed to keep the Republicans in power and voted Democratic, their bright, clean new neighborhood would soon resemble one of the worst neighborhoods in Queens. It was a visual warning that remained with him throughout his life.<sup>215</sup>

Like so many other families that moved from New York City to Nassau County during the postwar period, the zone leader’s family had been Democrats in the city. But once they moved to Nassau County, they switched parties. They reasoned that because the Republicans controlled local government, it would be far easier to go along with the majority than struggle in the minority. It was also understood

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Keller, “Levittown,” 232–233.

<sup>215</sup> Anonymous member of the Nassau Republican County Committee, interview by author, February 3, 2013.

that the party in power could deliver favors and jobs. When the zone leader was a teenager and he needed a summer job, his father approached the local Republican committeeman to ask to arrange for a job for his son.

The committeeman came through and offered his son a part-time job in the town's parks department. It was this part-time position that helped launch the young man's career in the County party. When he came of voting age, he registered with the GOP and soon after, was offered a full-time job with the county. In return, he was expected to help elect Republican candidates and contribute one per cent of his salary to the party. Attracted to the party's "broad principles," he quickly rose through the ranks and was eventually elected to local office.<sup>216</sup>

Fitting into their new community was an important aspect for many of the new suburbanites. Prior to the post-war population boom, the majority of Long Islanders were white and Protestant, and Catholics were in a minority.<sup>217</sup> The new people moving to the island, however, were either Irish or Italian Catholics or Jewish.<sup>218</sup>

Their political identities differed as well. Post-war Italians moving to Long Island tended to lean Republican, while the Irish tended to be affiliated with the Democrats.<sup>219</sup> The Jewish Democratic presence on Long Island also increased. During the early 1940s, the Jewish population on Long Island was fewer than four per cent. Most were registered Democrats, and studies show their impact on local elections was negligible<sup>220</sup> After the war, the number of Jews moving to Long Island increased rapidly until by 1962, the Jewish population on Long Island reached almost thirty per cent.<sup>221</sup> By that point fully sixty-six per cent of the Jewish population in Nassau County identified themselves as members of the Democratic Party.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Anonymous member of the Nassau Republican County Committee, interview by author, February 3, 2013.

<sup>217</sup> Rosenbaum, "Political Consequences," 227. Ippolito, "Political Perspectives," 61.

<sup>218</sup> Rosenbaum, "Political Consequences," 27–28. In 1954, twenty-seven per cent of Nassau County population was Catholic. The Jewish population was ten per cent.

<sup>219</sup> Ippolito, *Political Perspectives and Party Leadership*, 30,56,59.

<sup>220</sup> Rosenbaum, "Political Consequences," 28. The Jewish population was 3.7%.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.* 30, 223, 25. Rosenbaum points out that the decreases in the Republican electorate coincide with an increase in the Jewish population even if it is unclear that Jews as a whole voted for Democrats.

Sprague recognized the growing diversity on the island and instructed GOP committeemen to ignore previous party affiliation, ethnic identity, or religion when they visited newcomers. In her study of the Jewish community in Great Neck, Judith Goldstein confirms this approach by the GOP in her description of what happened to a Jewish couple after they moved to Long Island. Even though they were registered with the Democratic Party, their local Republican committeeman still came to see them. During his visit, he made it clear to them that the Republican Party had complete control over the community, and that it would be “easier” for them to join the party than to remain a Democrat.<sup>223</sup>

This approach was far different than what was occurring Orange County, California in the same era. There, the local Republican Party moved in the opposite direction. The suburban neighborhoods that sprouted around the growing number of defense manufacturers sought to maintain their homogeneity. As described by Lisa McGirr in *Suburban Warriors*, the Orange County Republican Party exploited suburban fears of outsiders and became the center of the ultra-right John Birch Society.<sup>224</sup>

Among Nassau County Republicans, ties with labor and immigrants were important. For the GOP, the enemy of the suburbs was New York City and the corrupting influences of the Democratic Party and Tammany Hall. By the time the suburban boom occurred, moderate Republicanism was deeply entrenched in Nassau County.

There was, however, a division between the Nassau County Republicans and the Democrats that Sprague could not overcome. Leaders in the Democratic Party were younger than the leaders of the Republican Party, and represented a “different political generation.” The age gap among the leadership continued to widen until by the mid-1960s, fully sixty-three per cent of the GOP leaders were aged 50 or older.<sup>225</sup>

To reach young families, GOP committeemen arranged neighborhood gatherings such as afternoon teas, evening cocktail parties, and backyard barbeques. They coached little league, became

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<sup>223</sup> Goldstein, *Inventing Great Neck*, 151.

<sup>224</sup> McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 53.

<sup>225</sup> Ippolito, “Political Perspectives,” 54, 55.

active in their church, and served as volunteer firefighters. In a short period of time, their neighbors recognized them not as politicians, but as friends whose good will and friendly regard deserved support on Election Day.<sup>226</sup> As their lives were woven into the fabric of the local community, the new arrivals found that it was “more fashionable to be a Republican.”<sup>227</sup>

For children and young adults, there were GOP-sponsored dances and hayrides and a formal “First Voters Ball” that was held in the ballroom of a Nassau County hotel. A GOP newsletter was distributed to young participants with news about these social activities, mixing gossip and politics. As the GOP became the social and political center in the lives of the young suburban adults, even young Democrats brushed aside any partisan loyalties in order to join in the good times. By the early 1950s, Young Republican Clubs were formed, ready to develop leaders and voters for the next generation.<sup>228</sup>

### The Culture of Patronage Politics

Building a social network was an important step in unifying former city Democrats with the Nassau GOP. However, the time-tested and perhaps most effective approach to maintaining and building the political machine was the use of patronage jobs.<sup>229</sup> As stated in the previous chapter, in Nassau County, positions were most often filled by appointing temporary or provisional employees.<sup>230</sup> The county commission rarely offered competitive examinations for most positions, and temporary workers remained in their jobs indefinitely. In the decade following World War Two, as communities grew and the demand for government services increased, the need for additional government employees to deliver those services was exploited by the Republican machine. By 1956, “almost two-thirds of all town and

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<sup>226</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 140, 151.

<sup>227</sup> “Growth of Nassau Aids Republicans,” *New York Times*, Oct 23, 1949. Mollie Keller argues that the people who moved to the new suburbs of Nassau County identified as a single class so that there were easier to politically organize. Keller, “Levittown and the Transformation,” 223.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid. Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 154, 155, 159, 160-161.

<sup>229</sup> As late as the year 2000, writer Gail Collins observed that the Nassau Republican machine provided newcomers the illusion of access to local government. This was the same way city machines built power among immigrants. Gail Collins, “That Sleek Suburban Political Machine Blundering in the Burbs,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 9, 2000, 89-90.

<sup>230</sup> “Nassau Votes 65Gs to Fix Civil Service,” *Newsday*, April 10, 1956.

village civil service employees” and “forty one percent of county job holders were political appointees.”<sup>231</sup>

Teenagers growing up on Long Island learned that if they wanted to find jobs during their summer vacations, or if they wanted a full-time job after high school graduation with the county, town, or village, they would first have to register to vote with the Republican Party. Before anyone was hired, their party registration was checked by their election district committeemen. Anyone not registered with the GOP found it difficult to get hired for any type of job, either part-time or full-time.<sup>232</sup>

Nick LaMorte learned this lesson when applying for his first job. In 1949, LaMorte’s father who was a member of Local 7 of the Carpenters Union moved his family from New York City to Amityville in Nassau County. When Nick turned eighteen, he decided to apply for a summer job in the parks. When he talked about it with his friends and family, they told him that he should first register to vote with the Republican Party. As LaMorte explains, the decision to become a member of the GOP wasn’t based on ideology but was viewed as the political price you had to pay to get a job.<sup>233</sup> A current member of Nassau County’s Republican Party executive committee had a similar experience. As a teenager during the 1960s, he had a part-time job in the parks department. He enjoyed his work, and so he approached the full-time workers in the department for advice on the best way to get a full-time job. “You better join the Republican Party,” they told him.<sup>234</sup> He followed their advice and was hired.

Long Islanders learned about these unwritten requirements through the GOP social networks and through family and friends. It was knowledge that was quickly woven into the everyday culture of suburban life on Long Island and something that everyone basically “knew.” In some communities of Nassau County, simply registering as a Republican wasn’t enough to prove party loyalty and get a job.

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<sup>231</sup> “Nassau Civil Service Unit Blames State for Test Lag,” *Newsday*, Feb. 16, 1956.

<sup>232</sup> Alan Eysen and Pete Bowles, “Politics Rules Summer Jobs In Nassau,” *Newsday*, July 25, 1977.

<sup>233</sup> Nick LaMorte, interview by author, April 17, 2012

<sup>234</sup> Anonymous member of the Nassau Republican County Committee, interview by author, Feb. 3, 2013.

There were some zone leaders who demanded that anyone looking for a job in local government first provide a letter of recommendation from their local Republican committeeman.<sup>235</sup>

The post-war organizing efforts by the Republican Party had a lasting impact. As late as the 1960s, when Frank Bail moved to Syosset, he noticed that “Democrats were virtually non-existent” in the town. Even though his neighbors were Republicans, he remained a registered Democrat. Bail’s Democratic roots went deep. His parents were union activists; his father was president of a local union, and his mother was active with the UAW Ladies Auxiliary. According to Bail, the members of the local Republican Party weren’t ideologues. They confined their attention to local government, ignoring their state and national organizations. The local party was everything, so when Bail’s teenaged children wanted to apply for a summer job in local government, they had no choice but to register as Republicans.<sup>236</sup>

Countless young people across Nassau County had the same experience. Registering with the GOP was a not just a practical requirement, it was a necessary condition for local government employment. By offering job opportunities, social inclusion, and government services, a political culture emerged whose effects could be felt on every level of life in Nassau County. It was this culture that union organizers faced when they tried to organize the growing thousands of workers in the defense industry.

### Labor’s League for Political Education

Sprague was not the only politician worrying about the 1948 presidential election. Congressman Hall was the chairman of the congressional campaign committee, and while he was generally conservative, he remained loyal to the centrist, pragmatic New York State Governor Thomas Dewey.<sup>237</sup> During the 1948 Dewey campaign, Hall and Sprague worked together, temporarily putting aside their differing political views. It was Taft’s job to line up support from congressional conservatives for Dewey.

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<sup>235</sup> George Bloom, interview by author, August 27, 2013.

<sup>236</sup> Frank Bail, interview by author, March 30, 2012.

<sup>237</sup> Farber, *The Rise and Fall*, 29; Norton Smith, *Thomas Dewey*, 361.

On Election Day, Nassau County voters overwhelmingly voted for Dewey, producing numbers so large that they put Dewey over the top to win New York State.<sup>238</sup> While Sprague was successful in delivering record-breaking numbers for his candidate in the county, he couldn't deliver the same result across the country, and Dewey narrowly lost the presidential election.<sup>239</sup>

Hall blamed Sprague for Dewey's loss, and publicly criticized Sprague's handling of the campaign. Not only did Dewey lose, there was a Democratic sweep of Congress.<sup>240</sup> Hall, however, had been re-elected, and in return for his victory, he demanded that Sprague relinquish his seat on the Republican National Committee to Hall.<sup>241</sup>

With the Democrats in control of congress, William DeKoning asked Congressman Hall to reconsider his support of the Taft-Hartley Act.<sup>242</sup> Hall had voted to override President Truman's veto in June of 1947.<sup>243</sup> After Hall's re-election, DeKoning lobbied Congressman Hall for the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act. Believing that he won re-election without labor's support, Hall refused.<sup>244</sup>

DeKoning was not pleased. Although expelled from the building trades' council, he still held considerable power in the labor movement. Looking to re-establish his leadership over Nassau County organized labor, he used Hall's stubborn anti-union position as a way to re-establish his influence among Nassau County unions.

The passage of the Taft-Hartley bill and a growing anti-union animus on the national and state levels was shifting the paradigm for labor. In order to better combat this swing to the right, the national AFL established Labor's League for Political Education (LLPE) in 1949. Its purpose was to serve as labor's political arm and to elect pro-labor candidates.<sup>245</sup> Following the AFL's announcement, DeKoning

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<sup>238</sup> "Dewey Barely Wins NY; Nassau Gives Edge," *Newsday*, Nov. 3, 1948.

<sup>239</sup> Helen Dudar, "Dems in Wonderland Find What They Said About Harry Is True," *Newsday*, Nov. 4, 1948; Norton Smith, *Thomas Dewey*, 543.

<sup>240</sup> "Democrats Win Congress," *Newsday*, Nov. 3, 1948.

<sup>241</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 213.

<sup>242</sup> Stan Hinden, "Hall-Sprague Feud Still Exactly That," *Newsday*, July 26, 1957.

<sup>243</sup> Dray, *There is Power*, 496–499; "Veto No Bar to GOP Labor Bill, Says Hall," *Newsday*, Jan. 31, 1947.

<sup>244</sup> William S. White, "GOP 'Old Guard' Likely To Keep Party Control," *New York Times*, Nov. 21, 1948; Hinden, "Hall-Sprague Feud.

<sup>245</sup> Palladino, *Skilled Hands, Strong Spirits*, 134–135.



announced that he was establishing a branch of the LLPE in Nassau County. Declaring that the organization was open to all organized and unorganized workers, he issued a “special Invitation” to the Independent Telephone Workers Union, and asked CIO Nassau-Suffolk Industrial Council to join so that the new organization could fight “for working people as a whole.”<sup>246</sup> The council had been dormant for several years, and resurfaced in 1949 with new leader, Charles Kerrigan. Kerrigan was the regional director of the UAW-CIO. He was also a noted anti-communist, and active in the American Labor Party.<sup>247</sup>

DeKoning stated that the Labor’s League for Political Education would “work to elect pro-labor candidates regardless of party affiliation.”<sup>248</sup> Rumors began to fly that DeKoning had been rebuffed by GOP committeemen who he tried to convince to turn against Hall.<sup>249</sup> While political pundits began to speculate that DeKoning’s purpose for the new labor organization was to wage political war on the conservative congressman.<sup>250</sup>

In the spring of 1950, DeKoning announced plans for a massive rally of workers to gather in opposition to Hall, calling the congressman the “enemy of organized labor.” Using the slogan “Get on the ball and upset Hall,” he promised that at least 3,000 Long Island workers and national labor leaders would attend the rally.

The turn-out was impressive; union leaders and members from all parts of Long Island gathered together in a show of political force. Two thousand “union men and women jammed the meeting rooms of the Labor Lyceum or stood outside as the voices of major leaders of the national, state and local AFL boomed through loudspeakers denouncing legislators and anti-labor, moneyed interests. Among them was

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<sup>246</sup> Dave Rosenbluth, “New Labor Unit Steps Into Long Island Politics,” *Newsday*, June 3, 1949.

<sup>247</sup> “Revamp Council to Aid CIO Unions on Island,” *Newsday*, May 19, 1949. The number of members of CIO-affiliated unions is unclear. In this article, the writer states it is 10,000. “Call on ALP Candidate to Halt Party Strife,” *Newsday*, Sept. 22, 1943; “AFL Education League Explained,” *Newsday*, June 22, 1949.

<sup>248</sup> Rosenbluth, “New Labor Unit,” June 3, 1949.

<sup>249</sup> DeKoning Muscle Move On GOP Is Bared by Hall,” *Newsday*, June 8, 1950.

<sup>250</sup> “DeKoning Sets Drive to Unseat Hall, Macy,” *Newsday*, March 18, 1950. DeKoning’s support of the Democrats was always by implication. The articles said “it seems more likely that DeKoning will support his Democratic opponent than run his own candidate” and that he would probably support a Democratic candidate. “DeKoning Opens War To Unseat Hall, Macy,” *Newsday*, April 18, 1950; “Say McKeown ‘Ducks’ Tie With DeKin 50 Campaign,” *Newsday*, Oct. 21, 1953; “Sprague Hits DeK-McKeown Link; ‘Conscience Clear’: Lent,” *Newsday*, Nov. 2, 1953; “Labor Group Opens Drive for Election \$\$,” *Newsday*, Sept. 30, 1949.

the CIO's Charles Kerrigan.<sup>251</sup> Also in attendance was Hall's Democratic opponent, Elizabeth Bass Golding. The audience included area politicians, Republican committeemen, and racetrack workers. Conspicuous by their absence was the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council, leading to rumors that the new leadership of the Building Trades Council had aligned with the GOP.<sup>252</sup>

Following the rally, the GOP convened a "powwow" at which both Sprague and Hall "blasted" DeKoning. At the time, there was speculation that Sprague's sudden turn on his friend DeKoning was only for show. The gossip was that, in reality, Sprague was guiding DeKoning. These rumors were due to the fact that in the past, Hall had "received feeble support, if any, from the rest of the GOP's bigwigs in previous scrapes with DeKoning."<sup>253</sup>

It was an "open secret" around the county that Hall had his eye on Sprague's Republican national committee seat.<sup>254</sup> Moreover, Hall made it no secret that he "heartily disapproved" of Sprague's close relationship with DeKoning.<sup>255</sup> Still other political scuttlebutt surfaced that DeKoning had "served an ultimatum on County Executive Sprague... to dump Hall or lose AFL's 35,000 votes in the November election."<sup>256</sup> Years later, it was revealed that there was truth to the stories. Moreover, despite their public attacks, Sprague and DeKoning remained allies.<sup>257</sup>

### Going After DeKoning

It was during this period that *Newsday*, a daily tabloid that first appeared on Long Island in 1940, turned to focus on DeKoning. *Newsday* was founded by Alicia Patterson, the wealthy daughter of the owner of the *Daily News* in New York. In the past, the paper had provided scant coverage of labor's activities on Long Island.<sup>258</sup> Stories of DeKoning's heavy-handed tactics had been circulating for years,

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<sup>251</sup> "DeKoning Sets Drive to Unseat Hall, Macy," *Newsday*, March 18, 1950.

<sup>252</sup> "Unionists Affirm Ouster of DeKoning; Deny GOP Tie," *Newsday*, May 24, 1950.

<sup>253</sup> "Beat Whom In The Fall," *Newsday*, Oct. 11, 1950.

<sup>254</sup> Dick Aurelio, "Sprague Overture to Hall Gets a Chilly Reception," *Newsday*, April 30, 1954.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. "Machine Politics," 232.

<sup>256</sup> "DeKoning Opens War To Unseat Hall, Macy," *Newsday*, April 18, 1950.

<sup>257</sup> A judge who knew Sprague well said that Sprague's "tactic was always to snuff out opposition as soon as it appeared." Francis J. Donovan, *The Judge Talks Politics: An Insider View on Law and Government* (New York: iUniverse, 2008), 42.

<sup>258</sup> Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History*, 192–209.

yet the papers took little notice. It was only after DeKoning organized Labor's League for Political Education and began raising money to go after Hall that the newspaper brought these rumors to the public's attention.<sup>259</sup>

The criticism of DeKoning by *Newsday* escalated. Reporters found him to be an easy mark for sensational stories. He was, by any account, a rough character with few social skills and a propensity to use foul language. There had been accusations leveled against him for years: for example, bid-rigging during the 1930s and charges of racketeering by the Democratic candidate for District Attorney in 1940.<sup>260</sup> Unfavorable articles began to identify him as "Boss DeKoning" and accused him of threatening workers "with the loss of their jobs if they persisted in refusing to join one of his unions."<sup>261</sup> Incriminating headlines followed in quick succession: "DeKoning Vengeance Crushed Foes" and "Benevolent Bill: Barrooms for His Boys."<sup>262</sup> They painted DeKoning as a bully, and his associates were described as thieves and murderers, all of them guilty of exploiting the labor movement for their own personal gain. One of DeKoning's co-workers, said to be connected with a "beer baron of Prohibition days, was shot to death as he stood in a telephone booth, not long after he served four months on an income-tax evasion rap."<sup>263</sup> These kinds of salacious accusations made for interesting copy and probably sold papers. But the story about the beer baron was not true. The day after printing the story, the paper admitted that the so-called victim who was shot in the phone booth "is a hale and hearty resident of a farm near Chicago."<sup>264</sup> Regardless of the retraction, the damage had been done.

None of the accusations of guilt by association were as damning as DeKoning's relationship with his mentor, Joe Fay. Over the years, Fay had been accused of various crimes, mostly related to his tendency to settle arguments with his fists. As mentioned earlier, Fay was sentenced to Sing Sing to serve a term of seven and one-half to fifteen years when the Supreme Court refused to hear his appeal on an

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid. 196.

<sup>260</sup> "Mulry Hits at Union Labor Racketeering," *Newsday*, Oct. 4, 1940.

<sup>261</sup> "Anti-Union Group Says DeKoning Threatened Them With Job Loss," *Newsday*, April 8, 1950.

<sup>262</sup> "DeKoning Vengeance Crushed Foes," *Newsday*, May 17, 1950; "Benevolent Bill: Barrooms for His Boys," *Newsday*, May 16, 1950.

<sup>263</sup> "Benevolent Bill," *Newsday*, May 16, 1950.

<sup>264</sup> "DeKoning Vengeance Crushed Foes," *Newsday*, May 17, 1950.

extortion conviction.<sup>265</sup> This association cast a shadow on DeKoning. *Newsday* articles about DeKoning almost always included some reference to Joe Fay, regardless of whether there was a pertinent connection. Both men were described harshly, as if they were characters in a James Cagney gangster movie straight out of central casting. Newspaper reporters said that their relationship was “master-pupil” and went so far as to say that “Fay looks and talks enough like DeKoning to be his twin brother.” There was nothing about DeKoning that *Newsday* didn’t criticize, from the way he dressed to his “rasping voice that achieves a tender balance between a snarl and bark.” They described him as an “inarticulate man” whose “intensity is expressed by the blunter, four-letter Anglo-Saxon words which he finds difficult to omit from his speech for more than 15 seconds at a time.” Even his wife came under attack, described as someone who “dresses expensively” and “chews gum constantly.”<sup>266</sup>

The scurrilous attacks and inflammatory language used to describe DeKoning and Fay mimicked the style of Westbrook Pegler, a writer whose columns were syndicated in newspapers across the country. Pegler wrote over-zealous, virulently anti-union screeds and blamed labor and labor leaders for most of the social ills of the country. Joe Fay was one of his favorite targets.<sup>267</sup> *Newsday* admitted that stories about DeKoning and his shady operations were full of hyperbole, and soon became repetitive. But according to Robert Keeler, a former *Newsday* reporter and author of a history of the paper, stories about DeKoning sold papers.<sup>268</sup>

That this sudden, critical spotlight on DeKoning and his union activities came after his success in establishing a coalition of unions in opposition to Hall was no accident.<sup>269</sup> According to Marjorie Harrison, it was Congressman Hall who encouraged the editor of *Newsday*, Alan Hathaway, to go “on the

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<sup>265</sup> Magnum, *The Operating Engineers*, 190–191; A.H. Raskin, “The Story Of Joe Fay: Labor Rule From Jail: A Career That Built Up ...” *New York Times* Oct. 25, 1953; “Upholds Labor Union Leaders Convictions.” *Lewiston Evening Journal*. June 23, 1947. Retrieved from:

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1913&dat=19170621&id=KUUpAAAAIABJ&sjid=9WYFAAAAIAIJ&pg=4092,7327366&hl=en>; Warren Weaver Jr., “Wicks Paid Visits To Fay In Sing Sing; Dewey Asks Why,” *New York Times*, Oct 3, 1953.

<sup>266</sup> “Benevolent Bill,” *Newsday*, May 16, 1950.

<sup>267</sup> David Witwer, *Shadow Racketeer: Scandal in Organized Labor* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 183.

<sup>268</sup> Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History*, 204–209. The DeKoning story netted *Newsday* a Pulitzer Prize in 1954. Retrieved from: <http://www.pulitzer.org/prize-winners-by-year/1954>.

<sup>269</sup> Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History*, 196–197.

war path against DeKoning.” Hall secretly went to *Newsday* to reveal Sprague’s stock holdings. The other major newspaper in Nassau County, the *Nassau Daily Review-Star*, was published by James Stiles, a long-time and close associate of Sprague. It printed stories favorable to Sprague. Stiles also happened to be *Newsday*’s Alicia Patterson’s chief competitor.<sup>270</sup>

In a scathing editorial, Hathway attacked DeKoning, saying that the labor leader had “o’er leaped himself” when he decided to “muscle in on politics.” Hathway said DeKoning declared war on Hall because the congressman “turned out to be beyond the labor leader’s realm of intimidation.” Not only was DeKoning wrong to try to influence voters; worse, he had a “corroding influence” on unions. It was the paper’s responsibility, they said, “to fortify the Long Island labor movement with all the information we can collect on DeKoning, and to print it for public judgment.”<sup>271</sup>

Even DeKoning’s charitable contributions were criticized as having “insidious motives” performed solely to “put men under obligation and thus build power” which he “used to club unfavored workers into selfish purposes of Mr. Big.” Years later, it would be learned that *Newsday* deliberately wrote provocative articles about DeKoning to goad him to sue them for libel. Their reasoning was that if he filed a suit, at trial he would be subject to cross-examination, during which they could ask him about all of his political connections in Nassau County.<sup>272</sup>

In June, DeKoning thumbed his nose at his critics by hosting a testimonial dinner at the Labor Lyceum for Democratic Glen Cove Mayor Luke Mercadante, the Democratic candidate for State Attorney General. Four hundred guests attended the dinner, among them the head of the Nassau County Democratic Party. In his speech, Mercadante attacked Sprague, the Nassau County Republican Party, and Governor Dewey.<sup>273</sup> As the head of Labor’s League for Political Education, DeKoning’s flirtation with the Democrats had become a full-blown affair.

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<sup>270</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 232.

<sup>271</sup> “That Man DeKoning,” *Newsday*, May 18, 1950.

<sup>272</sup> Ernest Havemann, “The Great Trotting Scandal,” *Life Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 20. Nov. 16, 1953, 197–210.

<sup>273</sup> Dave Rosenbluth, “Luke Bids for Att’y-General With Blessing of DeKoning,” *Newsday*, June 8, 1950.

As if to prove that he would not back off of his attacks on Hall, DeKoning announced that he had named a five-man committee to plan Hall's ouster from congress.<sup>274</sup> Outside of the announcement, the committee did nothing. His equivocation did not preclude the Nassau Industrial Council CIO from endorsing the entire Democratic slate.<sup>275</sup> They hired four full-time workers and arranged for a sound truck to drive through Nassau County neighborhoods to urge voters to support the Democrats.<sup>276</sup> But according to Justin Ostro, the CIO council was still a "poorly organized group of associated local unions without any purpose or goal."<sup>277</sup> Ostro came to Long Island to work as a machinist at Republic Aviation in 1950, at the same time that the machinists union was finally able to unionize Republic workers.<sup>278</sup> Ostro, a union activist from New York City, viewed the Nassau County CIO leaders as naïve, with little understanding of how local politics worked.

Their naiveté was apparent during a jurisdictional dispute with an AFL union. The Playthings, Jewelry and Novelty Workers International Union CIO had organized workers at a toy plant. When an AFL union issued a jurisdictional challenge, one hundred workers who had signed CIO cards walked off their jobs in protest. As the picketers circled the plant, county police were called in. They dispersed the strikers and allowed only eight of the workers to picket. The head of the Nassau-Suffolk CIO Council, Charles Kerrigan, was outraged, declaring the actions of the police were "unheard of." He protested that there "has been no injunction and certainly no violence. Yet the police are arbitrarily limiting pickets. They have no authority to do that." In frustration, Kerrigan appealed to the District Attorney. The DA brushed him off and instead referred him to the police precinct captain. In turn, the captain informed Kerrigan that he would not allow picketers to "clutter up the sidewalk."<sup>279</sup> The Nassau Suffolk CIO

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<sup>274</sup> "DeKoning Renews Drive To Unseat Hall and Macy," *Newsday*, July 24, 1950.

<sup>275</sup> Berni Fisher, "AFL Coy as CIO Backs Democratic Slate," *Newsday*, Oct. 10, 1950. There were actually four men appointed to the committee since the fifth refused the nomination. Newspaper accounts did not name the man or the union that refused the nomination. Bernadette Fisher, "AFL Political Role? Bill Sheds Darkness," *Newsday*, Oct. 11, 1950.

<sup>276</sup> Berni Fisher, "AFL Coy as CIO Backs Democratic Slate," *Newsday*, Oct. 10, 1950.

<sup>277</sup> *The Scanner* Vol. 2, No.2, Local 470 IUE, AFL-CIO (Dec. 1958), 4.

<sup>278</sup> "Republic Workers Give Union OK, IAM Wins 2-Year Fight By 61 Votes," *Newsday*, Nov. 2, 1950; During that same year, the IAM re-affiliated with the AFL. Mark Perlman, *The Machinists: A New Study in American Trade Unionism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 105.

<sup>279</sup> "Toy Strike in Fifth Day As Cops Limit Line to 8 Pickets," *Newsday*, March 7, 1950. When the union appealed to county District Attorney Frank Gulotta, they were referred to the precinct captain. The captain told CIO union leaders that more than eight pickets would "clutter up the sidewalk."

Council, unaware that political relationships dictated what the police did or did not do, was powerless to respond.<sup>280</sup>

The Council's endorsement of the Democrats precluded the possibility of a coalition of Long Island labor unions rallying against Hall as they had in 1943. The Republicans were the party in charge of county government, and a unilateral shift to the Democratic Party could mean a loss of union construction projects for the building trades and was therefore out of the question. DeKoning soon recognized that his position was untenable, and by the fall, while attending a meeting of AFL unions in Texas, denied any involvement in the elections, saying "I wouldn't know what's going on up there. I'm too busy here in Texas."<sup>281</sup>

Congressman Leonard Hall won again in 1950, beating his opponent soundly by a 2 to 1 margin. Following his victory, he sent a clear message to DeKoning saying that "the rank-and-file of labor voted for the Republican candidate and disregarded the propaganda and high-pressure efforts and orders of arrogant labor bosses."<sup>282</sup> Years later, it was revealed that DeKoning gave "a few thousand dollars" to Hall's opponent on Sprague's behalf because Sprague viewed Hall as a rival, and he wanted to weaken Hall by making sure that he ran "poorly on the ticket."<sup>283</sup>

### GOP Rivalry Redux

Though he was unable to defeat Hall, Sprague did have success in ending the career of another right-wing Republican, his old nemesis, W. Kingsland Macy. Macy was now congressman, with a district that lie mostly in neighboring Suffolk County. As a member of the Old Guard wing of the party, he continued to rail against the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act long after it passed. He supported the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act, and was politically aligned with Senator Robert Taft's conservative wing of the

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<sup>280</sup> "Named President Of LI CIO Council," *Newsday*, Dec. 4, 1953.

<sup>281</sup> Berni Fisher, "Dems Woo Labor, DeKoning Goes Kissless." *Newsday*, Sept. 22, 1950. .

<sup>282</sup> "Hall Returned to Congress For 7th Term Beating McKeown 2-1," *Newsday*, Nov. 8, 1950.

<sup>283</sup> "Say McKeown 'Ducks' Tie With DeKin '50 Campaign," *Newsday*, Oct. 21, 1953.

Republican Party. Macy but he was also a harsh critic of the moderates in the Republican Party, and branded Dewey “as a pariah.”<sup>284</sup>

Though Sprague rarely expressed his ideological views, during the 1950 congressional campaign he began to draw clear distinctions between his politics and Macy’s. In speeches around the county, Sprague made it clear that he did not support Macy. He began to call for an end to the “old line, conservative Republican Party,” and accused Macy of being stodgy and dogmatic.<sup>285</sup>

On Election Day 1950, Macy lost his congressional seat by a mere 138 votes.<sup>286</sup> Sprague’s supporters were jubilant. As the results came in at party headquarters on election night, they celebrated Macy’s defeat, saying, “What real Republican could feel sorry to see Macy beaten?”<sup>287</sup>

Macy attributed his loss to voter fraud in Levittown, a former rock-solid Republican community that during the election, inexplicably delivered a victory to his Democratic opponent.<sup>288</sup> Infuriated, Macy called for a recount. Macy’s attorney wanted to subpoena DeKoning, saying, “I want to see how many racketeers he imported and how many times they made the levers go down.”<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> McCue, “Thomas E. Dewey,” 299, 317.

<sup>285</sup> “New Guard for GOP Urged By State Att’y,” *Newsday*, June 29, 1950. According to Marjorie Harrison, Sprague strongly relied on polls. During one speech in which he criticized the ‘Old Guard,’ he referenced a 1950 poll of Hofstra University students that showed that while they favored the Republican Party, they viewed its leaders as too conservative. Hal Burton, “Hofstra Poll Backs GOP Minus Old Guard,” *Newsday*, Jan. 14, 1950.

<sup>286</sup> “Suffolk Closeup” Posted by Karl Grossman South Shore Press. Feb.19, 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.southshorepress.net/2014/19/suffolk-closeup-30/>; McCue, “Thomas E. Dewey,” 317.

<sup>287</sup> “GOP, Dems Hail the King’s Fall,” *Newsday*, Nov. 9, 1950; Jones, Bea, “Macy Only GOPster To Lose In Nassau,” *Newsday*, Nov. 8, 1950.

<sup>288</sup> “‘Small Town’ Atmosphere No Help to Macy in Vote Fight,” *Newsday*, April 19, 1951. Macy wasn’t off the mark. Just the year before the election, Republican election officials in Levittown complained about improper voter registrations. Their focus, however, were on the number of Independent-Fusion party members that were being registered. Leo Hanning, “Levittown Registration Charges,” *Newsday*, Oct. 18, 1949.

<sup>289</sup> “Small Town Atmosphere No Help to Macy in Vote Fight,” *Newsday*, April 19, 1951; Berni Fisher, “Macy Lawyer Seeks Labor Czar As Witness in Vote Fraud Probe,” *Newsday*, March 17, 1951; “Ernest Greenwood, Former Legislator Who Defeated Macy in Suffolk, Dead,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1955; “Say McKeown ‘Ducks’ Tie With Dekin in 50 Campaign,” *Newsday*, Oct 21, 1953; “Macy And Sprague At Odds On Voting: Suffolk Leader Charges His Cause ...,” *New York Times*, Nov 12, 1950; It wasn’t just the manipulation at the polls that caused Macy to lose the election. During the months prior to the election, the press somehow got hold of a letter that Macy wrote to the lieutenant governor promising forgiveness of a loan in exchange for political favors. The revelation erupted into a full-blown scandal. Duane Tanenbaum, *Herbert H. Lehman: A Political Biography*, (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2016), 345; Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History*, 160–163. Macy took the issue to court and years later, one of the judges in the case said, “I don’t know how Sprague sabotaged Macy’s campaign in Nassau County, but he had to be the saboteur.” Francis J. Donovan, *The Judge Talks Politics: An Insiders View on Law and Government* (New York: iUniverse, 2008) 42. Macy received no sympathy from *Newsday*. He was the owner of a rival newspaper in neighboring Suffolk County, and was dismissive towards *Newsday*’s publisher Alicia Patterson to launch a full blown campaign against him. Just before to the election, *Newsday* published a letter that implicated Macy in exchanging political favors with the lieutenant governor. It was a huge scandal and caused great embarrassment for Macy. Years later, Sprague revealed that he was responsible for releasing the letter to the press, something that Macy suspected. “Hanley Letter Big Election Factor,” *Newsday*, Nov. 4, 1950; Phil Sanborne, “Sprague Tipped Paper on Macy ‘Ambitions,’” *Newsday*, Feb. 15, 1955.



With Macy gone, Sprague set out to further cleanse the county committee of conservative Republicans. All those who had supported Macy or were in any way aligned with the Old Guard faced a primary challenge by Sprague's allies and lost their seats.<sup>290</sup> Even the president of the Levittown Republican Club, a Macy supporter, was targeted by Sprague.<sup>291</sup>

In 1952, Sprague announced that he would not run again as county executive and that he would relinquish the office that he had held since 1938.<sup>292</sup> All he would say about his future plans was that he planned to take "a more active part in national politics."<sup>293</sup> What he had in mind was to become chairman of the Republican National Committee.

He handpicked his successor, A. Holly Patterson.<sup>294</sup> Patterson was a figurehead; Sprague retained control of all of the political patronage and of course made all of the decisions regarding the distribution of party finances. He made it clear that "there was really no change in administration."

### Taking Aim

In the wake of his battles with Hall, DeKoning re-focused his efforts on regaining leadership of the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council. The Council was under siege. Anti-union contractors had filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board against nine leaders of the construction unions, including the executive secretary of the Building Trades Council. They were charged with secondary boycott when they tried to picket a non-union site, a violation of the Taft-Hartley Act.<sup>295</sup> As a result, several unions left the Trades Council, including the iron workers, the carpenters, and local 25 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.<sup>296</sup> DeKoning tried to recruit these unions in an attempt to build a new, parallel building trades organization. However, the majority of the building trades had no

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<sup>290</sup> "The King Is Dead—and Taft," *Newsday*, Aug. 22, 1951; "Dewey Aides Deny Seeking Macy Deal: Hughes, Governor's Candidate," *New York Times*, Aug. 16, 1951.

<sup>291</sup> "Dem 'Regulars' Win, 5 GOP Party Liners Bite Dust in Nassau Vote," *Newsday*, Aug. 22, 1951.

<sup>292</sup> Rosenbluth, Dave, "An Era Ends—Sprague Says Farewell" *Newsday*, Dec. 30, 1952.

<sup>293</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 212–213.

<sup>294</sup> "Russ Sat By as Holly Took Over," *Newsday*, Jan. 6, 1953.

<sup>295</sup> "9 Labor Leaders Broke T-H Law, Builder Group Charges NLRB," *Newsday*, June 15, 1950.

<sup>296</sup> *Nassau Review Star*, Jan. 3, 1952.

desire to see DeKoning return to any leadership position. Dick O'Hara, who was a member of IBEW Local 3 during the early 1950s, remembers most of organized labor gave DeKoning a wide berth.

"DeKoning was a bully to be avoided," he said. Most union members who had to come in contact with DeKoning and his group, he said, "would do as they say and give them a lot of room."<sup>297</sup>

In 1951, the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council elected "strongly anti-DeKoning officers."<sup>298</sup> To ensure that DeKoning would not return, they flew to the national AFL convention in California to meet with the executive council of the building trades department. There, they made their case to get rid of DeKoning once and for all.<sup>299</sup>

In an effort to build support with unions outside of the building trades, DeKoning interceded in a dispute between Local 1136 of the AFL State, County and Municipal Employees and the Town of Hempstead. There, he helped end a standoff between the sanitation workers and the town. While the agreement did not include a contract, the presiding supervisor of the town did agree to recognize the union. The settlement with the union also included a twelve per cent wage increase and other benefits. The representative of the sanitary workers praised DeKoning and the town supervisor for "their splendid efforts."<sup>300</sup>

DeKoning also tried to make peace with the Nassau District Council of Carpenters. They were being hit hard by contractors who were using non-union, immigrant labor. The immigrants were World War Two refugees, displaced persons called DPs, most of whom were from Eastern Europe. DeKoning promised that he would help organize a rally in opposition to the immigrant workers.<sup>301</sup> Fifteen hundred unionized construction workers demonstrated at the building site of a Latvian-born contractor who worked with non-union labor. At the rally, tempers rose and fists flew. DeKoning declared his efforts a

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<sup>297</sup> Richard O'Hara, interview by author Jan. 12, 2015.

<sup>298</sup> Bob Hollingworth, "AFL Labor Council Hammers DeKoning," *Newsday*, July 13, 1951.

<sup>299</sup> "DeKoning Tiff Set For AFL Confab Airing," *Newsday*, Sept. 7, 1951.

<sup>300</sup> "Sanitation Men Win Wage Increase, Union Recognition," *Newsday*, Sept. 15, 1951.

<sup>301</sup> "Anti-DP Rally Is DeKoning Putsch: Builder," *Newsday*, Dec. 29, 1951. DP was a pejorative term applied to the refugees, called displaced persons of World War Two.

success.<sup>302</sup> He announced that “the movement is straightened out,” and that he would welcome the “Judases back into the fold.”<sup>303</sup>

The “Judases” were the building trades unions that had refused to follow DeKoning. They were having none of DeKoning’s boasts. Instead, the officers of the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council filed lengthy charges against him with the executive committee of the AFL’s Building Trades Department. They accused him of raiding affiliated locals in an effort to set up a competing Trades Council.<sup>304</sup> The AFL Building Trades Department, however, refused to take sides in the dispute.<sup>305</sup>

During the anti-DP rally that DeKoning had organized, heavy equipment on the construction site had been damaged.<sup>306</sup> That night, two of the non-union contractor’s nephews went to DeKoning’s home to ‘complain’ about a damaged crane armed with a rifle and a gun. When they reached DeKoning’s property, they were met by four men, including DeKoning’s son, and were given a sound thrashing.<sup>307</sup> Beaten and injured, the men went to the police, and William DeKoning, Jr. was arrested. The press had a field day with the events. Above-the-fold, sensational headlines appeared in the local papers. During the following spring, DeKoning’s son was put on trial, found guilty, and fined \$250.<sup>308</sup>

In January 1952, DeKoning compounded his difficulties with other unions. The employees of the *Nassau Review-Star*, a newspaper in Nassau County, were on strike. The *Review-Star* was building new offices, and the members of the Nassau County Typographical Union, AFL set up a picket line at the construction site. The printers fully expected DeKoning’s local to honor their actions. Instead, they learned that a deal had been made. The publisher of the *Review-Star* “had a little talk with DeKoning and that they saw eye to eye,” with DeKoning agreeing that he would ignore the printers’ picket line.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Bernie Bookbinder, “Builder Defies Union To Halt Construction,” *Newsday*, Dec. 31, 1951.

<sup>303</sup> Don Kellerman, “DeKoning Takes Council Reins,” *Newsday*, Dec. 31, 1951. “AFL Building Trades Council Denies President Resigned,” *Nassau Review-Star*, Jan. 3, 1952.

<sup>304</sup> “DeKoning Power Grab Nears Showdown,” *Newsday*, Jan. 24, 1952; “DeKoning’s Bid to Win Over LI Drivers Repulsed by 2-to-1 Vote,” *Newsday*, Jan. 21, 1952.

<sup>305</sup> “DeKoning’s Fate, Like Tune May, May Not Be ‘Undecided’,” *Newsday*, Jan. 30, 1952.

<sup>306</sup> “DA Opens War on Labor Violence,” *Newsday*, Jan. 2, 1952.

<sup>307</sup> “Let Mysterious Trio Pass Unnoticed: DeKoning Kin,” *Newsday*, May 6, 1952.

<sup>308</sup> “Jury Finds DeKoning Son Guilty of Assault,” *Newsday*, May 9, 1952.

<sup>309</sup> “DA to Quiz DeKoning on Violence: Printers Charge His Union Violated RVC Picket Line,” *Newsday*, Jan. 4, 1952.

Rumors began to circulate that his relationship with contractors was under investigation by a New York City Anti-Crime Committee. His income from various sources was also being scrutinized by the Internal Revenue Service, including his profits from the food and bar concessions from Roosevelt Raceway, which he split with former assistant district attorney Albert DeMeo. *Newsday* was ramping up their coverage of DeKoning; and when DeKoning and his son visited Joe Fay in prison, it made headlines.<sup>310</sup>

The investigations took a toll; following DeKoning Jr.'s conviction, the elder DeKoning suddenly announced his retirement as business manager of Local 138 of the Operating Engineers. He continued, however, to collect the same salary and retained control over the local. His retirement, he said, was necessary, "for my own protection."<sup>311</sup> Because he was no longer Business Manager, he was given a new title, "president emeritus," and a lifetime contract.<sup>312</sup>

The New York City Anti-Crime Committee turned its focus to DeKoning, and the following spring, DeKoning made another surprise move. He suddenly resigned all of his union offices, left the leadership of the Operating Engineers Local 138 to his son William DeKoning, Jr., and moved to Florida.<sup>313</sup> The offices of the labor lyceum were shuttered, and he put the restaurant and bar up for sale.<sup>314</sup> He denied that any government investigation caused his sudden departure from Long Island—even though the head of the investigative committee claimed otherwise.<sup>315</sup>

DeKoning's resignation and retirement did nothing to satisfy the appetite of the local press. A stream of newspaper articles continued to flow, describing his heavy-handed control of racetrack

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<sup>310</sup> "DeKoning Quits; Hint Probe On," *Newsday*, May 13, 1953.

<sup>311</sup> "DeKoning Retires, Keeps Labor Grip," *Newsday*, July 7, 1952.

<sup>312</sup> "DA to Quiz DeKoning on Violence: Printers Charge His Union Violated RVC Picket Line," *Newsday*, Jan. 4, 1952. Though he claimed that he was now retired, DeKoning made one last and final effort to take over a Teamsters local but was soundly defeated in the election. "Blame Construction Tie-Up on DeKoning," *Newsday*, Dec. 31, 1952.

<sup>313</sup> "DeKoning Quitting As L.I. Labor Boss" *New York Times*, May 14, 1953.

<sup>314</sup> "The Boss Retires to a Mansion on Earnings from Labor Lyceum," *Newsday*, May 13, 1953. It didn't not become a home for retired union members. Nor were the proceeds of the sale used for charity or for the benefit of union retirees as DeKoning had promised in 1947. The deed to the Lyceum properties were in the name of his wife, Rose Mary DeKoning. Keeler, *A Candid History*, 187.

<sup>315</sup> "DeKoning Quitting As L.I. Labor Boss," *New York Times*, May 14, 1953. The committee was looking into claims that contractors paid DeKoning \$1,000 per house to avoid strikes. In another instance, one contractor claimed that he bribed DeKoning by paying \$1,200 for a glass of ginger ale at the Labor Lyceum.

employees. And for the first time, the newspapers began to describe the connections between DeKoning's control of the racetrack unions, his ties to George Morton Levy, and the "GOP brass" who gave him the authority to hire and fire "GOP underlings."<sup>316</sup> The scrutiny of their alliance reached a crescendo when a few months after DeKoning's retirement, in August of 1953, a man named Tommy Lewis was gunned down in the hallway of his Bronx apartment building.<sup>317</sup> Fleeing the crime scene, the gunman was himself shot by a patrol officer who had heard the shots.<sup>318</sup> Tommy Lewis was president of Local 32-E Building Services Employees International Union AFL at Yonkers Raceway with connections to the powerful Democratic machine in New York City.<sup>319</sup> The gunman was identified as Edward "Snakes" Ryan, a convict who the police speculated was hired to kill Lewis. Because of Lewis' position at the track, the State Harness Racing Commission embarked on an investigation of Yonkers Raceway.<sup>320</sup>

The newspapers had a field day, calling the murdered man a "labor czar" and beginning to draw comparisons between Tommy Lewis and DeKoning.<sup>321</sup> Days later, citing "labor sources," Long Island's *Newsday* ran an article which claimed that Lewis was murdered in retaliation for firing a man at Yonkers Raceway who was connected to Joe Fay. And since the paper had long since identified DeKoning as a "protégé" of Fay's, it seemed likely that DeKoning was involved.<sup>322</sup> The introduction of Joe Fay, now serving his sentence at Sing Sing prison, led several newspapers in the New York metropolitan area to publish a list of all Fay's visitors. The list set off a firestorm of controversy; among the names of state and national labor leaders and politicians was New York's Acting Lieutenant Governor, Arthur H. Wicks.<sup>323</sup>

Wicks visits to Fay caused an enormous amount of embarrassment for Governor Dewey. In response, Dewey appointed a three-man commission to investigate the entire harness racing industry and

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<sup>316</sup> "Bellicose Union Boss," *Newsday*, May 13, 1953; Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History*, 192.

<sup>317</sup> Ernest Havemann, "The Great Trotting Scandal," *Life Magazine* Vol. 35. No. 20, Nov. 16, 1953, 197-210.

<sup>318</sup> "Probe Ex-Cons at Yonkers Track," *Newsday*, Sept. 1, 1953.

<sup>319</sup> Stan Brooks, "Probe Records of Raceway Firm," *Newsday*, Sept. 4, 1953.

<sup>320</sup> "Set Plans Today for Probe of Yonkers Hiring," *Newsday*, Sept. 2, 1953.

<sup>321</sup> "State Opens Probe Today Into Trot-Gangster Deals," *Newsday*, Dec. 15, 1953.

<sup>322</sup> "Link DeKoning in Raceway Slaying Probe," *Newsday*, Sept. 5, 1953.

<sup>323</sup> Warren Weaver Jr., "Wicks Paid Visits To Fay In Sing Sing; Dewey Asks Why," *New York Times*, Oct. 3, 1953.

its stockholders. The panel was empowered under the Moreland Act, passed in 1907, which gave the governor broad investigative powers.<sup>324</sup>

### Suspicious About Sprague

While the Moreland Commission prepared to examine the list of stockholders, *Newsday* already had a list. It would be years before anyone realized the truth, but it was Congressman Hall, in an effort to “nail” Sprague, who gave the list of racetrack stockholders to the newspaper.<sup>325</sup> Hall had never forgotten how Sprague had impeded his ascent to a seat on the Republican National Committee.<sup>326</sup> He also didn’t like Sprague’s relationship with DeKoning and had always suspected that Sprague was somehow involved in DeKoning’s campaigns against him.

Sprague also had a problem with *Newsday*’s editor. Several years before the racetrack scandal broke, Sprague had been asked by the paper about his racetrack holdings. He hid the information from the paper, and when they discovered his lies, the editor said, “From now on, kid, we’re going after you.”<sup>327</sup>

In an editorial entitled, “Pattern of Corruption,” the paper revealed that Sprague “bought and now owns \$625,000 worth of racing track stock.”<sup>328</sup> They showed that Sprague also owned shares of Yonkers racing track, implying a connection to the unsavory characters surrounding the Lewis murder.<sup>329</sup> As the scandal unfolded, Sprague quickly and quietly sold his stock to his old friend, Nassau County contractor Andrew Weston, for an after-tax profit of \$195,000.00.<sup>330</sup>

Soon after his divestment, Sprague bought stock in another racing corporation, concealing his ownership by using the name of the Republican chairman of upstate Putnam County. He also bought

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<sup>324</sup> “Wicks Defies Dewey, Won’t Quit,” *Newsday*, Oct. 13, 1953. The Moreland Act was passed in 1907 and allows investigations of departments, boards, bureaus and commissions within the executive branch. “NY Gov’s Corruption Probe Of Lawmakers Questioned.” Retrieved from: <http://www.empirecenter.org/publications/ny-govs-corruption-probe-of-lawmakers-questioned/>

<sup>325</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 232.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid. 233; Berni Fisher, “On The Inside” *Newsday*, March 18, 1954.

<sup>327</sup> “Sprague Quits National GOP Post,” *Newsday*, Nov. 13, 1953. “Sprague Quits GOP Job,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 13, 1953. When a reporter first asked him whether he owned any race track shares, Sprague lied, saying that he did not. After his duplicity was uncovered, the paper’s publisher and editor went after him with a vengeance. Keeler, *A Candid History*, 206.

<sup>328</sup> “Pattern of Corruption,” *Newsday*, Oct. 6, 1953.

<sup>329</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 231.

<sup>330</sup> Bernie Bookbinder, “Dream Track’ Built on Rocky History,” *Newsday*, Aug. 2, 1957.

raceway stock for his daughter under George Morton Levy's name.<sup>331</sup> He narrowly escaped the scrutiny of the press and put to rest questions about his honesty and integrity, at least temporarily. Another investor in the track was Albert DeMeo. As described in Chapter Three, DeMeo had been an assistant District Attorney in Port Washington, who helped William DeKoning to win his fight against the independent union of sand miners. In 1945, DeMeo resigned from that position to become director of the Cedar Point Trotting Association. The association had several partners. Besides DeMeo, the association included J. Russel Sprague, William DeKoning, and Assemblyman Norman Penny. DeMeo also owned a portion of all of the food concessions at Roosevelt, sharing the profits with William DeKoning.<sup>332</sup>

Revelations that Sprague had made a fortune in secretly owned racing track stock upended his political plans. With the Lieutenant Governor's involvement, the political fires around Governor Dewey were raging out of control. To spare the governor further embarrassment, in 1953, Sprague resigned from the national committee.<sup>333</sup> Sprague's seat wasn't even cold before Hall rushed to occupy it, and shortly afterward, President Eisenhower chose Hall to become the chairman of the Republican National Committee.<sup>334</sup> Congressman Hall wasn't through going after Sprague, and he tried to find someone to challenge Sprague for the chairmanship of the county committee. But there were no takers. Sprague somehow explained away his stock holdings to the satisfaction of the party faithful, and he was overwhelmingly re-elected.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid. Sprague's daughter sold her shares a few years later for a profit of \$150,000. Several years later, Sprague continued to claim that "he sold every share I owned." Harold H. Harris, "Sprague Quits GOP Job," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 13, 1953.

<sup>332</sup> Gardner, "Dewey's Nassau County Boss," 13–16; "Raceway Stock List Crosses Party Lines," *Newsday*, Oct. 1, 1953.

<sup>333</sup> "Sprague Quits National GOP Post," *Newsday*, Nov 13, 1953; Norton Smith, *Thomas Dewey*, 612. In his letter of resignation, Sprague continued to deny that there was anything untoward about his ownership of the stock because he never voted on his shares. Letter from J. Russel Sprague to Dean Taylor, Chairman, New York State Republican Committee, November 13, 1953. Dewey Files, Sprague, J.R. 1944–1957, Personal, Box 10: 41: 2, University of Rochester. In his public statement about Sprague's resignation as a National committeeman, Dewey stated that he hoped that Sprague would reconsider. Even after Sprague resigned, the newspapers continued to pound at Dewey's association with Sprague. "Dewey Could Do It," *Newsday*, Sept. 7, 1954. Bernie Bookbinder, "Trot Scandals Show Pattern of Corruption," *Newsday*, Aug. 26, 1954; Hal Burton, "The Sprague Dynasty," *Newsday*, Oct. 29, 1954; Berni Fisher, "On The Inside," *Newsday*, March 18, 1954.

<sup>334</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 214. Sprague didn't take his defeat lying down: he went on to take revenge on Hall by orchestrating a move that moved hundreds of federal appointments from members of congress to the state's county chairmen. The upstate Old Guard were especially "miffed" by this move since they didn't have the vast network of patronage appointments at their disposal that Sprague had in Nassau County. "Sprague Patronage Miffs Old Guard," *Newsday*, Feb. 19, 1953; "DC Parley Brings Agreement (?) On Sprague Plan for Patronage," *Newsday*, Feb. 26, 1953.

<sup>335</sup> Nassau County Republican committee members brushed aside Sprague's huge profits from the sale of racetrack stock as being justified saying that Sprague would have earned far more if he had stayed in private practice than serving as party chairman.

### DeKoning's Fate

Events did not turn out so well for William DeKoning. He, his son, and several close companions were indicted by Nassau County District Attorney Frank Gulotta on a score of charges, most of which were misdemeanors; but some were more serious, including fraud, extortion, and influence peddling.<sup>336</sup> One of the indictments involved the Hendrickson Brothers, whose “chief customer is Nassau County.”<sup>337</sup> These accusations opened the door for Democratic politicians to accuse the entire Republican county administration of being corrupt, and they called for the county to bar the Hendrickson Brothers from doing any business with the county.<sup>338</sup> The Moreland Commission issued an order that no racetrack employees could be hired from the Labor Lyceum. The commission also stripped DeKoning of all of his harness stock holdings and placed him on their “black list” of “undesirable stockholders.”<sup>339</sup>

Suddenly, on April 1, 1954, DeKoning shocked everyone when he pled guilty to two counts of extortion and one count of grand larceny.<sup>340</sup> His plea appeared to be part of an arrangement, and most of the other charges against DeKoning were dropped. Kickback charges related to the Mule Club against DeKoning's associates were dismissed, and his son William DeKoning, Jr. was given a one-year suspended sentence. DeKoning, Jr. was allowed to remain the head of Operating Engineers Local 138, but he was barred from holding any other union office in the county.

Upon sentencing, the judge told DeKoning that he was “a peculiar person.” He said, “On the one hand, you have taken advantage of your position as a labor leader to extort money from your fellow man... On the other hand, you have given generously to charity and have often helped fellow workmen in unfortunate circumstances. These people believe you a good man.” Described as “a sick man and broken man,” DeKoning's kidneys were failing and he was suffering from an infection. The judge sentenced him

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Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 233. During the early 1950s, there were approximately 1,100 republican committeemen and women in Nassau County. Bookbinder, Bernie, “Sprague Quits GOP's Top Level,” *Newsday*, Nov. 14, 1953.

<sup>336</sup> Dick Aurelio and Berni Fisher, “DeKoning Indicted for Extortion,” *Newsday*, Oct. 8, 1953; George Wheeler, “DeK, Son, Aides Deny 360–GGyp,” *Newsday*, Nov. 7, 1953; “Charge DeK, Kin Sold Influence,” *Newsday*, Dec 19, 1953.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid. Upon questioning by DA Frank Gulotta, Hendrickson also said that he had twice written recommendations for the release of Joe Fay after being “reminded” to do so by DeKoning. “Admits DeK ‘Reminder’ on Fay,” *Newsday*, Oct. 14, 1953.

<sup>338</sup> “Bar Hendrickson From Bidding on Sewer Contracts, Dem Asks,” *Newsday*, Oct. 20, 1953.

<sup>339</sup> “Probe Rips DeK's Iron Grip on Labor at Track,” *Newsday*, March 10, 1954.

<sup>340</sup> “DeKoning Pleads Guilty,” *Newsday*, April 1, 1954. DeKoning had originally been indicted 116 charges.



to serve three concurrent terms of one year and eighteen months at Sing Sing.<sup>341</sup> One month later, *Newsday* received a Pulitzer Prize for its series of reporting on William DeKoning.<sup>342</sup>

### The Class Bias of Justice

DeKoning's rise and fall from power did not follow a simple trajectory. His rise in the labor movement first came as a result of his fight for the prevailing rate. Sprague and the Nassau Republicans were eager to support him in his attacks on the Democratically-controlled WPA, and DeKoning and Sprague were able to use one another to advance their own agendas. During the war years, DeKoning maneuvered all of organized labor, including the new CIO unions, to fight against Hall's anti-labor votes. DeKoning led the charge against Hall's support of Taft-Hartley, a move that increased DeKoning's influence while at the same time served Sprague's political interests.

DeKoning's decision to cross picket lines on the Levitt projects, and to raid other unions, led to his expulsion from the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades. In an attempt to rebuild his following, he began to appeal to the growing number of CIO unions and to endorse Democratic candidates. The CIO unions were still too small and powerless to provide a base of support, and furthermore, the attempts to align himself with the CIO who supported Democrats violated the accepted practice of transactional arrangements with the Republican Party that had served him and his members so well for decades.

DeKoning's legal troubles came out of his relationships with contractors and the racetracks, as well as his demands that union members patronize the Mule Club at the Labor Lyceum. Newspaper stories consistently portrayed contractors as the innocent victims of DeKoning's heavy hand. Democrats recognized this bias and tried to get local government to bar DeKoning's contractor friends from future county construction contracts, but their demands went unheeded. Though the contractors and DeKoning engaged in practices that were illegal and unethical, it was DeKoning who was targeted. He was unpolished and uneducated, and that added to his vilification. The District Attorney later admitted that he

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<sup>341</sup> George Wheeler, "Sing Sing Gates Close On Dek," *Newsday*, April 10, 1954

<sup>342</sup> "DeKoning Jailed In Labor Racket; Son Wins Lenity: Former A.F.L. Boss," *New York Times*, April 10, 1954.

had engaged in pursuing DeKoning because of the inflammatory articles about his activities that were appearing in *Newsday*.<sup>343</sup> Robert Keeler, a former *Newsday* reporter who had written a history of the newspaper, argues that the editor of *Newsday*, Alan Hathaway, was caught up in a bad business deal involving DeKoning and had an axe to grind against him. *Newsday*'s publisher, Alicia Patterson was not above using her paper as a way to express her personal views and class bias. While Patterson had supported Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in 1944, 1948 and 1952, the paper endorsed Republican candidates for president. In 1956, the paper endorsed Adlai Stevenson, with whom Patterson was having an affair. In 1960, the paper endorsed John F. Kennedy.<sup>344</sup>

Arthur Hendrickson, DeKoning's elite partner, continued to fare well. He remained the head of the Valley Stream Republican Club and continued to use his political connections to get lucrative county construction contracts. He denied having any connections with Sprague and claimed he had only been to the racetrack a half dozen times in his life.<sup>345</sup> It was said that he went horseback riding every day until he was 82, and he died at the age of 89 with no hint of his involvement in the scandals of the 1950s.<sup>346</sup> The man who started it all, George Morton Levy, went on to live a long and fruitful life, and continued to enjoy the benefits of his brain-child, harness racing.<sup>347</sup>

Editorial writers were justifiably outraged that union members were compelled to spend six to eight dollars a week at the bar and restaurant at the Labor Lyceum.<sup>348</sup> Yet they were strangely silent at Sprague's demand for a one per cent annual "donation" from every patronage appointment to the

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<sup>343</sup> Bernie Bookbinder, "DA Admits Press Blast Brought DeK Probe," *Newsday*, Aug. 27, 1954.

<sup>344</sup> Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History*, 149–155. Patterson had a long affair with Adlai Stevenson. Robert Keeler, Email to author, June 14, 2018.

<sup>345</sup> "In The Defense Of Truth: To the People of Nassau County: HENDRICKSON BROS," *Newsday*, Oct. 30, 1953. The Hendrickson Brothers took out a full page ad defending their company against accusations of collusion with Sprague. They invited the "innuendo experts to prove that we won a county contract by any other method than by the sweat of our estimators' brows." Arthur Hendrickson was criticized because he had written a parole recommendation for Joe Fay. His defense of the letter was that Fay was "masterful in settling jurisdictional disputes in an impartial manner."

<sup>346</sup> Bernie Bookbinder, "How Contracting Tycoons Get That Way," *Newsday*, April 26, 1956. "Tribute of the Wicked," *Newsday*, Oct. 22, 1953.

<sup>347</sup> "The Many Careers of George Morton Levy," *Newsday*, July 20, 1977. In an editorial published upon Levy's death, *Newsday* called him the "Robert Moses of the private sector." They went on to say that "his death leaves a gap in leadership that Long Island can ill afford." There was no mention of his past as a criminal attorney, and his career defending men such as he gangster, Lucky Luciano. "George Morton Levy To Address GOP," *Newsday*, April 25, 1944.

<sup>348</sup> "Arthur Hendrickson, Founder of LI Firm," *Newsday*, June 20, 1982.

Republican Party. While Sprague was criticized for his involvement in the racetracks, his allies declared that his ill-gotten gains were well-deserved since he probably could have made much more money in the private sector than spending his career serving the public.<sup>349</sup> While DeKoning's demand that union members join the Mule Club helped send him to prison, the GOP's one per cent rule guaranteed Sprague's re-election as party chairman. It would be twenty years before the papers expressed a similar outrage at the demands made by the Nassau GOP of workers hired by the political infrastructure of the county.

The internal strife, the battle between Hall and Sprague, and all of the scandals surrounding the GOP could not have come at a more inopportune time. By mid-decade, there were signs of wear and tear on the alliance between the Republican Party and the building trades. While it still held, it had been weakened and was now increasingly vulnerable to Democratic challenge. By 1954, the percentage of Nassau voters pulling the Republican lever was dissipating. They were not responding to the "Eisenhower pull" that was evident everywhere else.<sup>350</sup> National and state voters were moving increasingly into the Republican column while Nassau County voters were moving in the opposite direction.

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<sup>349</sup> Bernie Fisher, "On The Inside," *Newsday*, Oct. 22, 1953.

<sup>350</sup> Rosenbaum, "Political Consequences," 37, 48, 51, 102; "Who Registered, And Why," *Newsday*, Oct. 18, 1949. Between 1947 and 1949, there was a twenty one percent increase in the number of registered voters in Nassau County.

## *Chapter 5*

### *The New Men of Labor and Shifting Party Politics*

A new generation of men emerged to lead the labor movement on Long Island in the 1950s.

There was new leadership in the Building and Construction Trades Unions, men who wanted little to do with DeKoning. There was also a rising generation of new labor leaders outside the construction trades. Beyond the peaceful façade of homes nestled in the winding streets of Nassau County were the factory gates. There, labor organizers from both CIO and AFL affiliates helped thousands of workers to unionize.

Throughout the 1950s, Nassau County was a hotbed of labor activity. The battles for workers' rights among industrial unions were hard-fought, and one strike followed another, altering the direction of organized labor. Surrounded by the militancy of the defense workers, Nassau public employees began to organize as well, joining the CSEA.

A new era for organized labor was underway. In 1955, the national AFL and CIO merged into one big organization, and they directed local affiliates to merge as well. On Long Island, this was not easy. Personalities and egos were large, and it wasn't until a group of thoughtful leaders from the defense-related industries emerged that the Long Island Federation of Labor was born. Most of the leaders of the newly minted Long Island Federation of Labor (LIFED) were Democrats. But they were also political pragmatists, who understood local politics. They recognized the long-standing relationship between the building trades and the Nassau Republicans, and straddled a fine line between both political parties, with the ultimate goal of establishing a strong presence in the county's politics.

The changing labor movement in Nassau County led to shifting the political alliances of organized labor. By 1961, the Long Island Federation of Labor (LIFED) helped elect a Democrat as County Executive, but the Nassau County labor movement also supported moderate Republicans. At the state and national level, they supported Nelson Rockefeller and other moderates.<sup>1</sup> Locally, they continued

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<sup>1</sup> Shelland, "The County Executive," 100. Between 1946 and 1958, Democratic registrations increased four times. Republican registrations increased two and one half times during the same period.

to work with the Nassau County Republicans such as Sprague who still retained a considerable amount of power. Sprague's hopes of becoming chairman of the Republican National Committee had been dashed, but he remained chairman of the Nassau County committee, where he kept a tight grip on the reins of power and the patronage machine. Because county and state dollars were still a main source of funding for construction projects, it was important that organized labor, especially the building trades, maintain good relations with Sprague and the Republican Party.<sup>2</sup>

On the national level, the conservative wing of the Republican Party focused on passing right-to-work laws. The Nassau County Republican Party remained moderate, and remained true to their friends in the labor movement. But they could do little to assure nervous defense workers that members of their party serving in congress would make sure that contracts would continue to flow to Nassau County defense manufacturers.

The Nassau Republicans also faced a growing movement of public sector workers, straining against the tight grip of patronage politics and party control. Union leaders who were Democrats recognized that Sprague's hold on the reins of power was slipping. They joined with Nassau County Democratic Party leaders and worked to further weaken the GOP. As the 1950's drew to a close, it appeared that the halcyon days of Republican control of the county were over.

### New Unions, New Leaders

The Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Workers District 65 had one of the first organizing campaigns outside of the defense plants and the building trades to draw public attention. As more New Yorkers moved from the city to Long Island, retail sales at the major New York City department stores began to decrease.<sup>3</sup> Some department stores in New York City had revenue losses so severe that they simply closed their doors forever. Still others, such as Gimbels, Sterns, and Saks Fifth Avenue, began to

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<sup>2</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31, 2015. Ostro said that one of the obstacles to organizing labor in support of Democratic candidates was the building trades unwavering support of the Republican Party.

<sup>3</sup> Minna P. Ziskind "Labor Conflict in the Suburbs: Organizing Retail in Metropolitan New York, 1954–1958" *International Labor and Working Class History No. 64*, (Fall, 2003), 55–73. In 1954, Manhattan's share of metropolitan sales shrank to 14.2 percent while Nassau County's sales rose 117 per cent.

chase shoppers to the suburbs and opened branches throughout Nassau County. In just a span of five years, between 1952 and 1957, thousands of retail clerks in New York City lost their jobs as one department store after another shut down.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the city department store workers were unionized and belonged to District 65. As the retail trade dried up in the city, these sales workers were laid off. The union tried several different tactics in the city stores, including concessionary bargaining. Realizing that they were losing jobs to the suburban stores, New York City retail clerks unions agreed to reductions in pay and benefits in exchange for guarantees that suburban store branches would hire union workers. These strategies were largely unsuccessful and in 1954, District 65 concluded that it was necessary to organize suburban sales clerks.

At the start, RWDSU utilized the same tactics they had employed in the city. They visited suburban workers in their homes and picketed stores at the malls. But they discovered this approach didn't work in the suburbs. The distance between workers homes made house visits difficult and time-consuming. Suburban workers often lived in communities far away from one another and outside of work, and there was no community base.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, because suburban department stores were built horizontally with multiple entrances, there weren't enough organizers and picketers to cover all of the entrances. Spread thinly around the perimeter of the stores, they were ineffective and gave the appearance that support for the union was weak.

Managers in the suburban stores also discouraged unionization by hiring more part-time than full-time workers. Part-timers received lower wages, making them less economically secure and more unwilling to risk their jobs by signing a union card. Schedules were constantly changed, preventing employees from establishing any sense of worker solidarity. Most of the workers were suburban housewives, and managers exploited their need for flexible schedules and part-time work.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Ziskind, "Labor Conflict," 58.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 51.

<sup>6</sup> Ziskind, "Labor Conflict," 67.

The RWDSU campaign failed, but the close elections showed that there was significant union support among the sales people. While it may be difficult to determine the impact of newspaper photos of women sales clerks picketing department stores on the general public, the RWDSU campaign helped to contribute to a general atmosphere of increased union activity on Long Island.

New CIO leadership helped expand unionism. Despite its successes in the 1930s and 1940s, the CIO Council remained a weak organization in Nassau County. But in 1953, a man named Emil Lindahl took over leadership. Lindahl began his career in the early 1940s as a gear cutter at Sperry Gyroscope. He became active in his union, Local 450 IUE CIO, and in just a few years he became the leader of the local. Lindahl was an effective organizer. Just one year after his election as head of the Council, CIO membership rose from 30,000 to 50,000.<sup>7</sup> He was recognized for his “dynamic personality and drive,” and he transformed the council into a “respected and powerful voice of labor on Long Island.”<sup>8</sup>

Another important labor leader to emerge was Justin Ostro, who came to work at Republic as a structural mechanic. Ostro had union experience: he had been active with several unions in New York City before moving to Long Island.

Management there was “high-handed, arrogant and dismissive.” The IAM stepped in, and by campaigning on “bread and butter economic issues such as pay rates and job classifications,” they won the right to represent Republic workers in 1950.<sup>9</sup> Soon after his arrival, he became a shop steward at the plant.<sup>10</sup> In 1952, the IAM achieved further success when a union shop provision was negotiated in their

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<sup>7</sup> “Named President Of LI CIO Council,” *Newsday*, Dec. 4, 1953; “Let Them Eat ‘Peanuts’: CIO Council,” *Newsday*, March 26, 1954; *The Scanner*, Vol. 2, No.2, Local 470 IUE, AFL-CIO, (Dec. 1958), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Leopold, *The Man Who Hated Work*, 140. Leopold writes that in the mid-1950s Tony Mazzocchi resurrected the Nassau Suffolk CIO Council. While Mazzocchi was an officer of the CIO, this is an overstatement of his role in the Long Island CIO. Some viewed Mazzocchi as a well-intentioned “gadfly.” Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 26, 2014; Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31, 2015; Patnode, “Labor’s Love Lost,” 138; Republic Workers Give Union OK, IAM Wins 2–Yr. Fight by 61 Votes,” *Newsday*, Nov. 2, 1950. There were two previous organizing campaigns, one in 1944 by the United Automobile Workers and one in 1948 by the Machinists Union. The Machinists lost the 1948 election 2 to 1. “Republic Workers Nix Union Second Time: Vote Close,” *Newsday*, Sept. 24, 1948.

<sup>10</sup> Southern Labor Archives: Archives of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers: IAM Oral Histories J-R. Retrieved from: <http://research.library.gsu.edu/c.php?g=115643&p=751813>.

contract.<sup>11</sup> The company continued to grow, and by 1953, Republic's unionized workforce had become a significant power in Nassau County.<sup>12</sup>

Although Ostro had been an active member of the Democratic Party in New York City—yet after moving to Long Island, he recognized that “if you needed something done, you called your Republican committeeman.” Ostro was politically astute and realized that if strikers' rights at Republic Aviation were to be protected, the help would have to come “right from the top,” because “nothing happened in Nassau County politics without Boss Sprague's approval.”<sup>13</sup> When Republic workers went on strike, Ostro made sure that union officials notified local GOP leaders in order to prevent over-zealous police officers from disrupting the picket line.

While DeKoning was no longer the leader of the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council, the political alliance that he and Sprague had formed remained an important part of each of their organizations. Ostro observed that throughout the 1950s, the Building Trades continued to support Republican candidates. Their underlying agreement remained: as long as Republican elected officials continued to support union-built construction projects, they could count on their union votes.<sup>14</sup>

But as a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat, Ostro recognized that there were an increasing number of Democrats among Republic's workforce. He surmised that the expansion of the defense industry would bring even more Democrats to Long Island. These unionized Democrats, he thought, could form the basis of a competitive Democratic Party.<sup>15</sup> He called it Long Island's “new unionism,” and believes that it set the stage for the emergence of a new generation of labor leaders who were more “worldly” than the previous generation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31, 2015; “Union Members OK Republic Pact,” *Newsday*, Feb. 18, 1952.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Rabb, “LI's Defense Industry Resists Unions,” *Newsday*, Dec. 3, 1974.

<sup>13</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, April 29, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Helen Dudar, “New Voters Biggest? In Nassau,” *Newsday*, Nov. 7, 1949. Democrats were hopeful and the GOP privately fearful that the “invasion...might cut heavily into the traditionally massive Republican pluralities.”

<sup>16</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, April 29, 2015. The unionism that Ostro describes was based on activism and political action rather than the transactional approach of the building trades.



There was one defense manufacturer that seemed impervious to unionization. The management at Grumman Aviation, the largest of the defense manufacturers, acknowledged the new unionism that Ostro described by developing strategies to keep unions out of their plants.<sup>17</sup> They used various tactics including building several smaller plants across the island instead of one large facility and frequently transferring workers between the facilities. This strategy made it difficult for workers to form strong bonds, while organizers had difficulty leafletting at the plant gates.

However, according to Ostro and others, one of the ways that Grumman management avoided unionization of their shop was by treating workers with dignity and respect. Grumman co-founder Jake Swirbul spread good-will inside and outside the plant. He also formed good relationships with labor leaders and won their respect.<sup>18</sup> But perhaps the strongest and most effective tactic was paying his employees salary and benefits commensurate with unionized workers. This was in stark contrast to the often hostile relationship that management had with labor leaders and workers at Republic Aviation.<sup>19</sup>

Rocco Campanaro was another member of the new generation of labor. Campanaro first went to work at American Bosch Arma Corporation as a field plant manager in 1940. By 1948, the 6,500 workers at the plant became members of the International Union of Electrical Workers, CIO, and Campanaro was elected as the Business Manager. He was a good organizer, and by 1953, there were two local unions at the plant, Local 460 and Local 464 with a combined membership of ten thousand.<sup>20</sup>

Management at the Arma Corporation remained hostile towards workers, and in 1953 a bitter strike ensued.<sup>21</sup> Violence erupted as union members battled scabs trying to cross the picket line, and two

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<sup>17</sup> Stoff, "Grumman Versus Republic," 116–124.

<sup>18</sup> George M. Skurla and William Gregory, *Inside the Iron Works: How Grumman's Glory Days Faded* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>19</sup> Leopold, *The Man Who Hated Work*, 114. Patnode, "Labor's Love Lost," 84, 174, 226. Ostro came to know Swirbul well. He recalls that Swirbul as an affable man who often engaged with workers on the shop floor and invited their input in the production process. Ostro recalled that in one instance, when a child of a union member at Republic fell gravely ill with a serious heart condition and needed an expensive operation. Republic management refused to help. It was Swirbul who offered to fund the life-saving operation for the child. Swirbul also partnered with Ostro and other labor and community leaders to establish a fund, a precursor to Long Island's United Way, to raise money for other charitable causes. Ibid. Ostro, Interview.

<sup>20</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 26, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> "Arma Strike Enters Second Month; Union Reports No Progress," *Newsday*, Aug. 24, 1953; "Arma, Union Reach Accord; CIO Won't Seek 1954 Pay Hike," *Newsday*, Sep 16, 1954. "Shop News." The Official Publication of Local 450 IUE-CIO, Vol XII, No.16, (September 17, 1953).

hundred county policemen were called in to establish order. There were six days of fighting, and nineteen people were arrested.<sup>22</sup> The strike lasted for ten weeks; even after it ended, tensions remained high. A year later, another contract dispute arose. Anticipating another strike, the company shut its doors, locking out more than 2,700 workers. But as the union prepared to set up picket lines, county authorities displayed remarkable restraint.

County Executive Patterson did not call out the county police, and only one police officer was assigned to patrol the site with instructions to simply watch the situation.<sup>23</sup> Instead, he stated that he “did not believe it was his job to stop strikes.”<sup>24</sup> Patterson’s reluctance for the county to get involved revealed what Justin Ostro described as a concerted effort on the part of the defense industry unions and local Republicans to establish a good relationship.<sup>25</sup> A short time later, the company and the union came to an agreement, and the strike was settled.

Another strike at the Arma plant in 1954 attracted national attention. The dispute began when the company introduced a plan to pay women workers decreased wages, even when they were doing the same work as men. As the leader of the local union, Campanaro fought the company’s plan and threatened a strike. At first, the men were reluctant to go out on strike over the issue of equal pay, but Campanaro convinced the men that without equal pay for equal work, they would be replaced by women at lower wages.<sup>26</sup>

The men responded to Campanaro’s practical appeal and voted to strike. They were aided by the Executive Secretary of District 3 of the IUE, Paul Jennings, who once served as the president of the local union at Sperry Gyroscope on Long Island in 1948.<sup>27</sup> He helped the strikers by arranging for a loan of approximately a million dollars from the national union. The assistance of the regional office to the strike

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<sup>22</sup> Art Perfall, “Strike Hits Arma; Plant Shuts to Avert Violence,” *Newsday*, Oct. 1, 1955.

<sup>23</sup> Dick Estrin, “Arma Picketing Starts; 115 Cops Watch,” *Newsday*, Oct. 2, 1955.

<sup>24</sup> Shelland, “The County Executive,” 170.

<sup>25</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> This was not the first time concerns surrounding women in the defense plants became an issue. In 1952, two women at Republic Aviation, a plant organized by the IAM, quit their jobs because of what was described as a “supervisor’s attentions.” Two thousand of their fellow employees staged a “sick out” in support of the women. “News Briefs,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 29, 1952. Email from Lurana Campanaro to author, May 14, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Marvin Howe, “Paul J. Jennings, Union Leader, Dies,” *New York Times*, Sept. 10, 1987.

efforts of Arma was significant; it demonstrated the growing influence of Nassau County labor leaders and the importance of Long Island labor. After thirteen weeks, management finally relented and the union won.

The strike received national media attention because it challenged the prevailing gender roles that were quickly evolving in suburban America.<sup>28</sup> To his credit, Campanaro was able to overcome these prejudices by framing the issue within a context that was transactional and practical. The result was an increase in union membership at the plant, and helped launch Campanaro's career in the Long Island labor movement.<sup>29</sup>

In 1955, there was a bitter and contentious strike at Republic Aviation. Justin Ostro had just been elected president as twelve thousand members of the IAM walked off the job and struck the plant. Violence erupted on the picket line as Republic management tried to break the union by bringing in scabs. Fifty-eight union members were arrested, among them union president Ostro.

When strikers were precluded from collecting unemployment benefits, a local Republican leader named Joseph Carlino interceded with the Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board on the union's behalf.<sup>30</sup> Carlino was a member of the State Assemblyman from Long Beach who was first elected in 1945. Carlino's political success in Long Beach was an anomaly, because the city had long been a bastion of the Democratic Party in Nassau County. Carlino, however, was a liberal Republican, well-regarded and known to work with members on both sides of the aisle.<sup>31</sup> He was a moderate, a Dewey Republican, who never hesitated in promoting labor's agenda. In 1952, he was the sole Republican in the State Assembly to vote against an anti-picketing bill.<sup>32</sup>

The strike lasted sixteen weeks. It was bitter and contentious, the "longest and costliest in Long Island's labor history."<sup>33</sup> Following the strike, the workers who had been arrested had their day in court.

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<sup>28</sup> Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*, 148–150.

<sup>29</sup> Rocco Campanaro Obituary obtained from Lurana Campanaro, Hauppauge, New York. Aug. 26, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author April 29, 2015. "State Sets Precedent on Strikers Benefits," *Newsday*, Jan. 25, 1957.

<sup>31</sup> Retrieved from: [http://liherald.com/stories/Joseph-Carlino-9-remembered-as-a-politicalgiant,7286?page=2&content\\_source=](http://liherald.com/stories/Joseph-Carlino-9-remembered-as-a-politicalgiant,7286?page=2&content_source=)

<sup>32</sup> "Smoke Smugglers and Pickets Hit in 2 Albany Bills," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Feb. 5, 1952.

<sup>33</sup> Dave Kahn, and Tony Insolita, "12,000 Strike 4 Republic Plants," *Newsday*, Feb. 20, 1956; Arnold Brophy, Bob Rhodes, and Stan Brooks, "End Violence, Court Warns In Jet Strike: Court Warns: End Strike Violence," *Newsday*, Feb. 24, 1956.

County judges dismissed all of the charges against the strikers, including those who had been charged with assaulting a police officer.”<sup>34</sup> Justin Ostro had developed an understanding with Carlino and the Republicans in power, and he believes that it was their assistance during this strike that helped “labor come into its own.”<sup>35</sup>

### Long Island Labor Merges

In 1955, the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations merged, creating one national organization, the AFL-CIO. Local affiliates were directed to follow suit and were allotted two years to work out the details.<sup>36</sup> Long Island’s AFL unions met on April 20, 1955 to begin to develop an organizational structure to better negotiate with CIO-led unions. To this end, they reactivated the “long dormant” AFL Central Trades and Labor Council founded by William DeKoning, Sr. during the late 1930s. The meeting was chaired by Robert MacGregor, President of Local 457 International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). More than one hundred delegates representing seventy-five thousand members attended the meeting to elect MacGregor as their new president.<sup>37</sup>

Over the next three years, the leaders of the Long Island labor movement struggled to come to merge the AFL and the CIO. A significant obstacle was William DeKoning, Jr. In 1954, his father was sentenced to three concurrent terms of eighteen months in prison on two counts of extortion and one count of grand larceny and DeKoning, Jr. was given a suspended sentence. Banned from holding union office outside of the county, he was allowed to remain as the leader of the Operating Engineers Local 138. Reformers in the union, however, wanted to get rid of DeKoning, Jr., and there was continuous infighting.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Tony Insolia, “2 Rivals Battle For Leadership Of Republic Union,” *Newsday*, Nov. 30, 1956.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Ostro interview, April 29, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Rayback, *A History of American Labor*, 425.

<sup>37</sup> Haig Chekenian, “Dormant LI Labor Council revived by AFL Unions,” *Newsday*, April 21, 1955; “Asserts Labor Has Bad Press,” *Newsday*, Feb. 20, 1946. In this 1946 newspaper article, MacGregor was identified as the President of the Nassau-Suffolk Local of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Arnold Brophy, “AFL-CIO Merger Sparking LI Labor Fight,” *Newsday*, Nov. 29, 1955. The AFL membership numbered 75,000 and the Nassau Suffolk CIO Council numbered 40,000.

<sup>38</sup> “DeKoning Jailed In Labor Racket; Son Wins Lenity: Former A.F.L. Boss,” *New York Times*, April 10, 1954.

During the spring of 1956, two members of reformers in Local 138 went on a radio program hosted by labor columnist Victor Riesel and blasted DeKoning Jr. Riesel was noted as a crusader against what he saw as corruption within the labor movement.<sup>39</sup> Several hours after the broadcast, as Riesel was getting into a car on the street, two men approached him, and one of them threw sulphuric acid in his face. DeKoning, Jr. was accused of orchestrating the attack, but he denied any involvement. With a reputation already in tatters, it was doubtful that his account had credibility.<sup>40</sup>

A year later, in 1957, William DeKoning, Sr. passed away.<sup>41</sup> The courts ordered his son, William DeKoning, Jr. removed from Local 138 and it was placed under trusteeship.<sup>42</sup> Free from the DeKoning's influence and control, the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council, led by John E. (Buddy) Long and Robert Forrester, set out to fully participate in the merger with the rest of organized labor on Long Island.<sup>43</sup>

There was, however, another "big stumbling block" to the merger of the Long Island labor movement. The president of the Nassau-Suffolk CIO Council, Emil Lindahl built the council into a significant force in Long Island labor. He was known as a "fireball" with a mercurial personality, hot-headed with a quick temper.<sup>44</sup> Lindahl was self-important, and insisted that as a condition for any merger of the CIO with AFL on Long Island, a salaried position be created for him. His demand was viewed as unreasonable and other labor leaders were unwilling to agree.<sup>45</sup>

By 1958, the members of the CIO council were tired of Lindahl's ultimatums, and support for him dwindled. When he announced that he was leaving, members happily to accept his resignation.<sup>46</sup> As

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<sup>39</sup> Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History*, 250.

<sup>40</sup> "William DeKoning Chief of Operating Engineers Union." *New York Times*, July 29, 1979. "DeK Lawyer: Riesel A Congenital Liar," *Newsday*, April 6, 1956.

<sup>41</sup> Jim Hadjin, "DeKoning Dies DeKoning Sr. Dead At 59: 'Big Bill' DeKoning Dead Labor Czar Succumbs at 59," *Newsday*, Oct. 19, 1957.

<sup>42</sup> "AFCIO Orders Ouster of DEK: AFCIO Says DeK Must Go, Or Else," *Newsday*, Aug. 21, 1958. "William DeKoning Chief of Operating Engineers Union." *New York Times*, July 29, 1979.

<sup>43</sup> John Cummings, "Forrester Quits Labor Unit Post," *Newsday*, July 2, 1959.

<sup>44</sup> Austin Perlow, "Lindahl Resigns as CIO Leader," *Long Island Press*, Oct. 30, 1958; "Petty Politics," *Newsday*, June 4, 1958; Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, May 20, 2014; "Let Them Eat 'Peanuts': CIO Council," *Newsday*, March 26, 1954.

<sup>45</sup> Bob Greene, "Lindahl Quits CIO Job; See LI Labor Merger," *Newsday*, Oct. 30, 1958.

<sup>46</sup> "200 Fete Lindahl At Testimonial Dinner," *The Scanner*, Local 470-IUE-AFL-CIO, Dec. 1958, 4. "Austin Perlow, "Lindahl Resigns as CIO Leader," *Long Island Daily Press*, Oct 30, 1958; Bob Greene, "CIO Council Pulls Out Of LI Fund Drive," *Newsday*, June 3, 1958. An example of Lindahl's combative behavior was when he demanded additional labor representation on

one of the leaders said, "Let's just say that the removal of Lindahl removed the question of personalities and let us get down to basic issues."<sup>47</sup>

To take Lindahl's place, the Executive Board of the CIO Council elected Rocco Campanaro of the IUE. Campanaro was energetic, forward thinking, and determined to reinvigorate the organization. He activated the Committee on Political Education, COPE, and appointed Anthony Mazzocchi, the president of Local 49 of the United Gas, Coke, and Chemical Workers' Union at the Helena Rubenstein factory plant in Roslyn as its chairman.<sup>48</sup>

With Lindahl and DeKoning out of the picture, plans to unify the Long Island AFL and CIO accelerated. Rocco Campanaro and Robert MacGregor led the plans for the merger. In January 1959, they decided that first, they would establish a joint political program, and asked Anthony Mazzocchi to develop a campaign.<sup>49</sup> They then decided on a name for the new organization: in March 1959, they announced that it would be called the Long Island Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO (LIFED).<sup>50</sup>

Naming the organization was easy; a more difficult and pressing concern for them was to negotiate the matter of union jurisdiction. Jurisdictional disputes were an on-going problem for unions all over the country, and on Long Island it was no different. This situation was especially evident during organizational campaigns where CIO and AFL unions battled for representation rights. These battles over jurisdiction sometimes devolved into personal attacks and smear campaigns, resulting in a lasting ill will between some unions and their leaders.<sup>51</sup>

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the Long Island fund, the precursor to United Way. Union representatives on the board didn't support him. When he couldn't get his way, he pulled the CIO Council out of the fund. Lindahl was soundly criticized by both AFL and CIO representatives for his actions, including the former national director of Community Services for the CIO. Despite his reputation, no one in the labor movement that I spoke to remembers Lindahl.

<sup>47</sup> Austin Perlow, "Predict Labor Merger in a Month," *Long Island Daily Press*, July 8, 1959. "AFL, CIO Units On LI Agree To Unite; Vote Set," *Newsday*, Oct 16, 1959.

<sup>48</sup> Bob Greene, "Official to Protest New President of CIO Group," *Newsday*, Nov. 3, 1958. Campanaro did have competition. Bernard O'Reilly, president of UAW Local 661 at the Fairchild Engine Division wanted the position and the meeting was described as "stormy." O'Reilly vowed to file a protest with the national AFL-CIO, but failed to follow-through.

<sup>49</sup> Austin Perlow, "Van Arsdale Jr. To Head Merged AFL-CIO Council," *Long Island Press*, Jan. 29, 1959.

<sup>50</sup> "New Name In Labor: Lif of L," *Long Island Press*, March 1, 1959.

<sup>51</sup> Patnode, "Labor's Love Lost," 232. The IAM, AFL leveled corruption charges against the IUE, CIO Local 450 at a division of the Sperry corporation in upstate New York because of incidents surrounding the IUE on Long Island.

In May of 1959, just as MacGregor and Campanaro appeared to be making progress in unifying their two organizations, an “old family fight” resurfaced. The International Union of Electrical Workers, affiliated with the CIO, refused to back down from raiding a plant where workers were already represented by the Sheet Metal Workers Union, AFL. Both sides lobbed personal attacks on one another, creating even more ill will. The national AFL-CIO finally stepped in and directed the IUE to end their campaign.<sup>52</sup>

The images of a divided labor movement were not helpful to merger efforts, and Campanaro and MacGregor made efforts to put on a show of mutual cooperation. When Local 1199 of the Retail Drug Employees Union went on strike, the two men walked the picket line together. Their photograph appeared in the newspaper, shaking one another’s hand, and each carrying a similar sign protesting the unfair treatment of the workers.<sup>53</sup>

Merger talks continued, guided by representatives of the national AFL-CIO. Michael Mann, the regional director of the AFL-CIO, and R.J. Thomas, a former president of the UAW, helped to hammer out the details, including how to structure the new organization.<sup>54</sup> At first, rumors circulated that Robert Forrester, the secretary-treasurer of the Nassau-Suffolk Building and Construction Trades Council, would serve as president. But ill health forced him to resign, and he retired to Florida.<sup>55</sup> To take his place, Robert W. MacGregor was selected as LIFED’s first president.

The agreement determined that the president would be a ceremonial position and would not receive a salary. Day-to-day operations would be carried out by two executive vice-presidents, and these would be full-time paid positions. Rocco Campanaro of the CIO and Anthony Costaldo of the AFL were selected to serve in those roles.<sup>56</sup> Fourteen vice presidents, seven each from the AFL and the CIO, were also appointed. Once the per capita formula was determined, the entire proposal for the merger was

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<sup>52</sup> “A.F.L.-C.I.O. WARNS CAREY TO BAR RAID: He Is Reported Defiant Over,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1959; A.H. Raskin, “Old Family Fight Flares for Labor,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1959.

<sup>53</sup> “Hospital Peace Hopes Dim As Truce Team Sees Union,” *Long Island Press*, June 2, 1959.

<sup>54</sup> Perlow, “Predict Labor Merger,” Jan. 29, 1959.

<sup>55</sup> John Cummings, “Forrester Quits Labor Unit Post,” *Newsday*, July 2, 1959.

<sup>56</sup> Anthony Costaldo was President of the State Raceway Employees Union Local 276.

presented to the leadership of both AFL and CIO unions for ratification.<sup>57</sup> Nearly four years after the merger of the national AFL-CIO, in November 1959, representatives of the seventy-five thousand members of Long Island's labor movement met at the Garden City Hotel and formally voted to become one unified organization. The long-awaited Long Island Federation of Labor was born.<sup>58</sup>

The birth of the Long Island Federation of Labor coincided with the re-birth of another organization on Long Island, the Nassau County Democratic Party. In 1958, a new county chairman was elected. John "Jack" English represented a new type of Democratic leader on Long Island. English was dynamic and eager to take on the Republicans.<sup>59</sup> He was friends with an important Democratic family, the Kennedys of Massachusetts. English was also friendly with LIFED vice-president, Rocco Campanaro, and the new president of the Long Island Federation of Labor, Robert MacGregor. Justin Ostro and Lurana Campanaro, who were both active in Democratic politics at the time, knew English well. They described him as young, energetic, and smart.<sup>60</sup> Labor Attorney Richard O'Hara remembers Jack English as a great organizer and credits him with turning Nassau County politics around.<sup>61</sup>

These new leaders, many of whom moved from New York City, were Democrats. There were other signs that labor's political loyalties were shifting. During the second half of the decade, the number of registered Democrats on Long Island increased more than four times. The ratio of registered Republicans to Democrats "was reduced from more than five to one to more modest two and one-half to one."<sup>62</sup> Democratic leaders and union activists who began to view Long Island as "virgin ground" to build up the Party. Rocco Campanaro became the coordinator for John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign on

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<sup>57</sup> "AFL, CIO Units On LI Agree to Unite; Vote Set," *Newsday*, Oct. 16, 1959.

<sup>58</sup> "A.F.L. AND C.I.O. UNITS JOIN ON LONG ISLAND," *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 1959. "All Ready for Action," *Publication of the Central Trades & Labor Council of Nassau-Suffolk Counties* Vol 3 No. 4, (Dec. 19, 1959). Rocco Campanaro's obituary (written by family members) claims that there were eighty thousand members of the Long Island federation of Labor in 1959. Campanaro files.

<sup>59</sup> "English Seen Winning Dem Leadership," *Newsday*, Aug 21, 1958; Stan Hinden, "English, Only 32, Wins Dem Control," *Newsday*, Sept. 3, 1958.

<sup>60</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31, 2015; Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, August 26, 2014. Both Lurana Campanaro and Justin Ostro were active in Democratic politics. Lurana Campanaro recalls that English was aware of the charges of corruption being waged against Sprague and made sure that "there were no letters, no phone calls and everything was done in his office."

<sup>61</sup> Richard O'Hara, interview by author, January 12, 2015. O'Hara was a member of Local 3 in New York City and worked towards his law degree while working as an electrician.

<sup>62</sup> Ippolito, "Political Perspectives," 55.



Long Island.<sup>63</sup> Even more radical labor leaders like Anthony Mazzocchi began to see new opportunities for political change on Long Island.<sup>64</sup>

### Civil Unrest

While workers in the private sector were organizing, there was little opportunity for public employees to have any input about their jobs. Workers in the towns, villages, and special districts had little job security, and despite the attempts to expand civil service to these workers during the early 1940s, little had changed. The Nassau Civil Service Commission controlled the entire civil service process and determined when tests would be administered. Even those who had achieved civil service status often first entered the system as temporary or provisional employees hired by the political machine.

The public sector was excluded from organizing under the provisions of the 1935 Wagner Act.<sup>65</sup> In New York State, the Condon-Wadlin Act of 1947 prohibited public sector workers from going out on strike.<sup>66</sup> In New York City, a public employees union, the United Public Workers (UPW), was initially supported by Mayor LaGuardia and his successor O'Dwyer. However, by 1953, it was considered a threat to managerial control and forced to disband.<sup>67</sup>

There was a workers' association available for state workers. The Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) was founded in 1910 by a group of state workers who were career civil servants. Its original purpose was for state employees to get group rates for life insurance. But it was by no means a labor organization. The CSEA rejected the idea of collective bargaining and viewed labor unions "with suspicion." For salary increases or any other job-related issue, they relied on their lobbying efforts at the

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<sup>63</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 26, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Les Leopold, *The Man Who Hated Work*, 140.

<sup>65</sup> Brooks, *Toil and Trouble*, 171.

<sup>66</sup> The Condon-Wadlin Act was an anti-labor passed in the Dewey administration. "Dewey OK's Civil Strike Ban Bill" *Newsday* March 28, 1947. Dewey signed the bill despite the opposition of labor with "apparent disregard for possible reprisals." In 1948, Dewey was trying to "shake his pro-labor reputation" on the assumption that it would lead to more support from the more conservative factions of the party. McCue, "Thomas Dewey," 172. The Condon-Wadlin Act was punitive and "did not provide any alternative means for settling labor-management disputes." CSEA Staff, *A Century of Service: The Story of CSEA's First 100 Years*, (New York: FSC Nixed Sources, 2010), 50.

<sup>67</sup> Freeman, *Working Class New York*, 85.

state legislature.<sup>68</sup> When Local 1482 of the American Federation of the state, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) tried to organize a union among village employees in Sea Cliff, the mayor proclaimed that unions were unnecessary because his office was always available to have what he said were “frank discussions” with employees who were welcome to bring any “gripes” that they had to the Mayor’s office.<sup>69</sup>

In 1947, the CSEA opened membership to county and other municipal employees to enable them to purchase low-cost insurance policies.<sup>70</sup> In 1953, a branch of the CSEA was established in Nassau County.<sup>71</sup> That same year, Irving Flamenbaum went to work for the Nassau County Welfare Department. Trained as a pharmacist, Flamenbaum was hired as a provisional employee. Although his job status was tenuous, he set out to recruit other county employees.<sup>72</sup>

Flamenbaum began to talk to county workers about their working conditions. Even though Flamenbaum was a registered Republican, he hid his activities from the county administration because they “frowned on anything suggesting a union.”<sup>73</sup> The meetings were held in secret; members met in the basements of taverns and restaurants with lookouts posted outside of the buildings, watching for spies. Always fearful of someone taking down names, Flamenbaum knew that he and others could be fired at any time. To collect the five dollars in annual dues, he would visit workers at their desks, surreptitiously gathering a nickel and a quarter at a time.<sup>74</sup>

In one instance, Flamenbaum made the mistake of complaining about the working conditions at county welfare offices to a newspaper reporter. He said that county welfare workers were forced to work in a “dark, dreary, poorly lighted and ventilated corner of the courthouse basement” and that morale was low because “our offices are a reflection of our attitude, our program and our role in the community.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> CSEA Staff, *A Century of Service*, 9, 14, 32.

<sup>69</sup> “AFL Says Sea Cliff Has Anti-Union Bias,” *Newsday*, Dec. 6, 1951.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* *A Century of Service*, 48.

<sup>71</sup> Maureen O Neill, “CSEA Facing Test of Strength,” *Newsday*, Aug. 13, 1970.

<sup>72</sup> Roy Silver, “How Nassau Employees Got Organized,” *New York Times*, May 8, 1977. When Flamenbaum was first hired in 1950, there were only one hundred members of the CSEA in Nassau County.

<sup>73</sup> Silver, “How Nassau Employees,” May 8, 1977.

<sup>74</sup> Dick Zander, “The Evolution of a ‘Militant’ Labor Leader,” *Newsday*, Dec. 16, 1967.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

Shortly after the article appeared in the newspaper, the administration reacted swiftly and decisively. Flamenbaum's supervisor demanded an immediate retraction. A week later, the reporter complied and apologized for what he had written. The reporter claimed not only that he misquoted Flamenbaum, but also that he had put "words in his mouth."<sup>76</sup>

Despite these obstacles, Flamenbaum persisted. He attended meetings of the Board of Supervisors with his "hat in hand," begging for raises or promotions for county employees. By bowing and scraping, he was able to increase county workers' benefits and to reduce the work week from five and a half days to five days per week.

His actions paid off, and by 1954 the size of the CSEA chapter had doubled to two hundred members. Flamenbaum's position was reclassified to a permanent employee, providing him with civil service protection.<sup>77</sup> No longer a provisional employee, he lobbied the County Executive and the Board of Supervisors and won the "unofficial" right for the CSEA to represent workers.<sup>78</sup> The Board overcame its past reluctance to workers' organizations and agreed to discuss raises, promotions, and working conditions with Flamenbaum, albeit it without the benefit of a contract.

Some county workers viewed this as a "sweetheart arrangement," and they had little faith in Flamenbaum's ability to take on Sprague and the power of the political machine.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the number of workers who joined the CSEA continued to rise. Two years later, there were approximately two thousand members of the Nassau County chapter.<sup>80</sup>

The county's recognition of Flamenbaum as the unofficial representative of county workers occurred within a backdrop of attacks by local Democrats against the Nassau County patronage machine. This time, however, the criticisms came from state officials.

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<sup>76</sup> Bernie Fisher, "On The Inside," *Newsday*, May 28, 1953.

<sup>77</sup> Zander, "The Evolution," Dec. 16, 1967; O'Neill, "CSEA Facing," Aug. 13, 1970. Flamenbaum was a member of the Public Welfare Employees Association and became head of the association in 1954. "Public Welfare Group To Install Officers," *Newsday*, March 24, 1954.

<sup>78</sup> Zander, "The Evolution," Dec. 16, 1967.

<sup>79</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 12, 2014.

<sup>80</sup> George Wheeler, "Nassau Acts to Remedy Civil Service," *Newsday*, March 30, 1956. The large number of employees that joined CSEA also show how dramatically county government was expanding.

In 1954, voters returned control of congress to the Democrats In New York, Democrat Averell Harriman was elected governor. His margin of victory was thin; he had no political coattails and was unable to bring in a Democratic majority, and the assembly and senate remained Republican.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, because his predecessor, Thomas Dewey, had held office since 1938, state government was rife with GOP patronage appointments.

For the new governor, these events created a Hobson's choice. If he engaged in wholesale firings of these Republican appointees and replaced them with loyal Democrats, he would invite the ire of the Republican majority, leaving little to no chance for the success of his legislative program. However, if he failed to distribute patronage positions to Democrats, party stalwarts would find it difficult to support him in future campaigns. Because the state legislature was Republican, Harriman was reluctant to engage in wholesale firings of Republican patronage workers. It was a political calculation that would ultimately come back to undermine him. Harriman's assumption that Republican State Senators and Assemblyman would be grateful to the Democratic governor for keeping Republican patronage workers was naïve.<sup>82</sup> Other Democrats refused to play by the patronage rules laid down by Harriman, and set out to battle the strongest and most effective GOP machine in the state, Nassau County.

In 1956, State Civil Service Commissioner Alexander Falk, a Democrat, lobbed the first salvo at the Nassau County Republicans. To great fanfare, he announced that he had found that Nassau Republicans had grievously misused the county civil service system. Fully one-third of approximately 5,000 Nassau County workers were provisional or temporary, and he called for immediate reform in the county.<sup>83</sup>

Stepping forward to defend the Nassau County Republicans was State Assembly Majority Leader Joseph Carlino.<sup>84</sup> Carlino was loyal to the GOP machine, particularly to Sprague. As a young

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<sup>81</sup> Cox-Richardson. *To Make Men Free*. 237; Leo Egan, "Harriman On Top: 9,657 Lead Is Open to Change by Recanvas," *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 1954. The final results were not announced until several days after Election Day; "GOP Controls NY Legislature; Margin Reduced," *Newsday*, Nov. 3, 1954.

<sup>82</sup> Judson Lehman James, "The Loves and the Fishes: New York State Gubernatorial Patronage, 1955–1958" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1966), 29.

<sup>83</sup> Arnold Brophy, "Says Politics Rule Nassau's Civil Service," *Newsday*, Feb. 10, 1956.

<sup>84</sup> "Carlino Attacks Dems on Planning Bill, Civil Service," *Newsday*, Feb. 23, 1956.

assemblyman, he had introduced legislation to increase the number of judges in Nassau County from seven to ten. The bill's successful passage helped widen the number of patronage opportunities at Sprague's disposal and established Carlino as Sprague's protégé.<sup>85</sup>

As a response to Falk's attacks, Nassau County Executive A. Holly Patterson and the chairman of the county Civil Service Commission dug in their heels. They hung up on reporters who called them for comments.<sup>86</sup> It was perhaps why the press turned the issue into a full-blown scandal with above-the-fold headlines. The newspapers revealed that fully 41 per cent of county workers and two-thirds of the 733 workers in the county towns, villages, and special districts were patronage employees.<sup>87</sup> When reached for comment, Irving Flamenbaum was reticent to respond. All he could muster to say was that the county needed to correct the system.<sup>88</sup>

The one county department that conducted regular examinations was the police department. However, candidate testing was not free of attempts to control who was hired. Exams were comprised of a written test and an oral interview. The questions on the written portion of the exam were loosely designed and allowed for subjective answers. The interview portion was clearly subjective, permitting favored candidates to be selected.<sup>89</sup>

State Commissioner Falk continued to condemn the county civil service system, calling it the "worst in the state."<sup>90</sup> When Nassau County Democrats gleefully joined in the chorus, Republicans went on the offensive. They blamed the state for "never ending delays" in administering tests.<sup>91</sup> Though, their protests rang hollow when Falk pointed out that for almost two decades, the Nassau County Civil Service Commission operated independently of the state and scheduled its own tests for county employees.

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<sup>85</sup> "Increase Nassau County Judgeships," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 28, 1952; "Bill to Increase Nassau Judges Is Signed," *Newsday*, March 27, 1952.

<sup>86</sup> Brophy, "Says Politics," Feb. 10, 1956.

<sup>87</sup> Arnold Brophy, "Towns, Villages Fill 2/3 of Jobs By Politics: Survey," *Newsday*, Feb. 14, 1956; "Civil Service Unit Meets Today To Answer Attacks," *Newsday*, Feb. 15, 1956.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. Flamenbaum claimed he knew nothing of the patronage machine. He said, "It's hard to believe. It doesn't seem possible. I didn't know anything about it. I never went into the records of the towns and villages."

<sup>89</sup> Berni Fisher, "On the Inside," *Newsday*, Feb. 17, 1955. Charges of favoritism in hiring at the police department included the accusation that the answers on the test were subject to the determination of the person correcting the test. James Carver, interview with author, April 19, 2012.

<sup>90</sup> "Nassau Civil Service Unit Blames State for Test Lag," *Newsday*, Feb. 16, 1956.

<sup>91</sup> Arnold Brophy, "Civil Service Reform Up to Nassau: State," *Newsday*, Feb. 17, 1956.

Along with the attacks on the county government's handling of civil service, there was a rising militancy among Nassau County workers.<sup>92</sup> This was occurring throughout New York State, and public employees began to flex their political muscle.<sup>93</sup> In their state newsletter, CSEA leaders warned that although Eisenhower had won New York by 800,000 votes in 1952, "The Republicans know, as well as do the Democrats, that a lapse of four years can work a considerable change." Furthermore, they said, public employees represented "almost twenty percent of the vote," and both parties had to "make strong appeals for the civil service vote as a major objective toward victory."<sup>94</sup>

This was alarming news to Nassau's GOP leadership. With attacks on the patronage system front and center on the public agenda, they realized that it would become an issue to be used against them during the elections. Even worse was the possibility of losing the votes of county workers. To mollify county workers, in 1956, the Nassau County Board of Supervisors hired a firm to develop a reclassification study of county workers.<sup>95</sup>

As a result, the county adopted a plan that would immediately award permanent civil service status to all county workers who had been hired as provisional employees, with no requirements for a civil service exam.<sup>96</sup> One year later, a similar plan was adopted for the fifteen hundred employees of the Town of Hempstead, the largest town in Nassau County, and all the temporary employees were automatically granted civil service status and pay raises.<sup>97</sup> The Nassau Republican Party was now prepared to fully participate in electing a Republican governor in 1958.

Incumbent Governor Averill Harriman was politically weak and unpopular. The GOP smelled blood in the political waters, and several candidates surfaced, eager to take on Harriman in the general

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<sup>92</sup> Shelland, "The County Executive," 77.

<sup>93</sup> H.J. Bernard, "Civil Service Vote Big Enough To Swing November Elections." *Civil Service Leader*. Vol. XXIX. No. 3, (Tuesday, September 25, 1956): 1.

<sup>94</sup> Bernard, "Civil Service Vote Big Enough," 1, 4.

<sup>95</sup> Brophy, "Civil Service Reform Up," Feb. 17, 1956; "Nassau Votes 65G's To Fix Civil Service," *Newsday*, April 10, 1956. The plan was limited to county workers, and did not include employees who worked for towns, villages and special districts.

<sup>96</sup> "Asks Overhaul, Pay Hike For Nassau Civil Service," *Newsday*, May 7, 1957.

<sup>97</sup> "Hempstead to OK Job Plan Giving 97Gs in Pay Hike," *Newsday*, Dec. 10, 1957.

election. The two most viable were Nelson Rockefeller and former Long Island Congressman and Chairman of the Republican National Committee, Long Island's Leonard Hall.<sup>98</sup>

Nelson Rockefeller was a well-known millionaire with moderate views. He had never held elected office; nevertheless, in 1954, President Eisenhower appointed Rockefeller as undersecretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. As undersecretary, Rockefeller displayed his liberal Republican leanings when he “promptly tried to create a national healthcare system.”<sup>99</sup>

He had strong roots within organized labor. When he became manager of Rockefeller Center in 1938, one of his first actions was to jettison the company union that his father had installed, and instead recognized the Building Maintenance Craftsmen, AFL. It was then that he formed a life-long friendship with George Meany, who at the time was the head of the New York Building and Construction Trades Council.<sup>100</sup> Rockefeller was also friendly with David Dubinsky of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and Jacob Potofsky of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. These were important unions with large memberships in New York, and they helped broaden Rockefeller's appeal among labor unions.<sup>101</sup>

On the other hand, Rockefeller's chief rival for the gubernatorial nomination, Leonard Hall, had an extensive resume of government service. As a favorite son of Oyster Bay, he assumed that he had the support of the Nassau County GOP.<sup>102</sup> Hall claimed to support unions, but his voting record proved otherwise. During his past battles with William DeKoning Sr., he often used harsh remarks towards DeKoning, which offended labor leaders.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> A third candidate, Oswald Heck was Sprague's first choice, but came to the conclusion that Heck couldn't beat Harriman. Stan Hinden, “Hall and Sprague Bury Hatchet In Dems, Ask Unity,” *Newsday*, Sept. 24, 1957.

<sup>99</sup> Cox-Richardson, *To Make Men Free*, 237.

<sup>100</sup> Norton Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 130–131, 661–662. Candidates Aim at Special-Interest Groups,” *Newsday*, Sept. 18, 1958. Harriman and Rockefeller both claimed to support the working man.

<sup>101</sup> Norton Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 45–46, 777–778, 817–818. Rockefeller was closely associated with David Dubinsky of the International Ladies Garment Workers Unions and Jacob Potofsky of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers.

<sup>102</sup> Stan Hinden, “Meet the Team That May Score for the Republicans in the Fall: Team From Different Worlds,” *Newsday*, May 27, 1958. Hall was first elected to the state assembly in 1926.

<sup>103</sup> “AFL Union Honors Hall With Medallion,” *Newsday*, Nov. 2, 1950.

One of Hall's biggest problems was his political rivalry with Sprague. As described in Chapter Four, their relationship had completely soured during the 1950 congressional elections. Sprague made public overtures to mend their friendship, but they remained at odds.<sup>104</sup>

When Hall made it known that he intended to run for governor in 1957, Sprague refrained from making an endorsement. When Sprague's protégé, Assemblyman Joe Carlino, announced that he was supporting Assembly Speaker Oswald Heck of Schenectady for the GOP nomination for governor, it was a sign that Sprague was supporting Heck. If Hall wanted the full support of the Nassau County Republicans, he would have to publicly make amends with Sprague.<sup>105</sup> Shortly after Carlino's declaration of his support for Heck, Hall arranged a meeting with Sprague and announced that the two men would "bury the hatchet."<sup>106</sup>

Despite their public reconciliation, Sprague had no intention of supporting Hall. Unbeknownst to Hall, Sprague was secretly working to secure the nomination for Nelson Rockefeller. He reasoned that if Rockefeller were elected governor, he would be in a position to run for President of the United States which would then allow Sprague's man, Joe Carlino, would run for governor.<sup>107</sup>

Another impediment to Sprague's support of Hall was that Hall had declared support for Vice-President Richard Nixon for the 1960 GOP presidential nomination. To make sure that his plans materialized for Carlino, it was crucial to block Hall from getting the Republican nomination for governor.<sup>108</sup> During the spring of 1958, the newspapers revealed Sprague's machinations. Hall realized that he was duped, and without the support of Sprague and the county committee, Hall was forced to drop out of the race.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Dick Aurelio, "Sprague Overture to Hall Gets a Chilly Reception," *Newsday*, April 30, 1954; Berni Fisher, "On The Inside," *Newsday*, May 21, 1953; Harrison, "Machine Politics," 217.

<sup>105</sup> Stan Asimov, "Carlino Backs Heck in Bid to Block Hall," *Newsday*, June 3, 1957. Carlino's support came with Sprague's approval.

<sup>106</sup> "Hall and Sprague Bury Hatchet In Dems, Ask Unity," *Newsday*, Sept 24, 1957.

<sup>107</sup> "Political Life Begins at 40 for Carlino," *Newsday*, March 20, 1958.

<sup>108</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 219.

<sup>109</sup> Heck had significant health problems which caused him to drop out of the race. He immediately threw his support to Nelson Rockefeller. Heck died less than two years later. "Oswald Heck Dead at 57; Assembly Speaker 22 Yrs," *Newsday*, May 21, 1959; Stan Hinden, "Heck Supports Nelson, But Hall Gets a Boost," *Newsday*, July 9, 1958.



During the gubernatorial campaign, Rockefeller's support for organized labor remained firm, and he even took on President Eisenhower. Following congressional hearings on ties between organized crime and unions, President Eisenhower remarked that unions were "corrupt" and had to be "fumigated."<sup>110</sup> At a gathering of local Republicans in Nassau County, Rockefeller criticized the President for his remarks. Nassau County Republicans praised Rockefeller's defense of labor while in upstate New York, the "Old Guard" were furious.<sup>111</sup>

In Nassau County, Sprague shored up support for Rockefeller by strengthening support among county workers. Even after Falk's revelations and civil service reform, fully one-third of the eight thousand county employees remained exempt from civil service requirements. These workers remained dependent on the GOP machine to keep their jobs and remained dissatisfied.<sup>112</sup> A letter to the editor that appeared in the local newspaper called past re-classification efforts the "greatest hoax perpetrated" on workers, and further declared that "the public employees of Nassau County will now welcome any labor union."<sup>113</sup> County Executive Patterson tried to mollify the county workers and "granted government employees a salary raise they had been demanding for years." But "from the employee's point of view, the raise appeared to have been granted reluctantly."<sup>114</sup>

Even so, Nassau County delivered a strong plurality for Rockefeller, helping him win the 1958 election, making him one of the few Republicans who survived a national Democratic wave.<sup>115</sup> During the election, organized labor targeted Republican candidates and incumbents across the country who supported right-to-work legislation. Only one Republican of note escaped. In Arizona, Senator Barry Goldwater won his election by getting "out in front of fellow Republicans to challenge the power of organized labor."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> "Rocky To Skip Nixon Talk on LI Tonight," *Newsday*, Oct. 23, 1958.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. "Rocky To Skip Nixon Talk."; Fleeson, Doris, "Washington Calling: Rocky's High Road," *Newsday*, Oct. 24, 1958.

<sup>112</sup> Bill Butler and Bob Caro, "Nassau's Job Plan Would Leave 2,400 Patronage 'Plums'," *Newsday*, Feb. 11, 1960.

<sup>113</sup> Letter to the Editor, "County Employee (sic) Looks Ahead to Unionization," *Newsday*, Aug. 26, 1959.

<sup>114</sup> Shelland, "The County Executive," 77.

<sup>115</sup> "Democrats Sweep 1958 Elections; Will Have 64 Senators, 283 Representatives, 35 Governors." In *CQ Almanac 1958*, 14th ed., 11-713-3-11-716. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, (1959).

<sup>116</sup> "Shattered GOP Maps Overhaul," *Newsday*, Nov. 6, 1958.

Nursing their losses, the national Republican Party began to craft an attack on unions under the guise of “labor reform.”<sup>117</sup> Republican politicians friendly to labor, like newly elected Governor Nelson Rockefeller, briefly jumped on the “labor reform” bandwagon. With his sights set on the 1960 Republican nomination for president, Rockefeller assumed that supporting “labor reform” might be necessary to offset accusations of being too liberal from the right-wing of the party. He instructed aides to begin drafting a labor reform bill to submit to the state legislature. When asked what the bill should include he said, “Oh, I don’t care what you put in it, as long as I can call it labor reform.”<sup>118</sup>

### Nassau Republicans Implode

During the run-up to the 1960 national convention, Hall and Sprague continued their fight. At stake was control of the county delegates to the GOP national convention. With Hall in favor of Richard Nixon and Sprague supporting Governor Nelson Rockefeller, each represented a different end of the political spectrum. Rapprochement between the two men appeared impossible. Young Republicans began to chafe at Sprague’s and Hall’s fights and continued dominance over party affairs and began to publicly demand that both men step aside.<sup>119</sup> Succumbing to the pressure, each resigned their county party leadership positions in the fall of 1959. Hall submitted his resignation as chairman of the Oyster Bay Republicans while Sprague resigned as chairman of the Nassau County Republican Committee and as leader of the Hempstead Town Republicans.

Sprague’s resignations, however, did not mean that he gave up control of the party apparatus. He retained power through his surrogate, County Executive A. Holly Patterson, whom he selected to take his place as chairman of the Nassau County Republican committee. Sprague made it clear to Patterson that while he might have the title of chairman, control of the two thousand patronage appointments would

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<sup>117</sup> Harriet Pike, “Control of Politics by ‘Big Labor’ Is Threat. Speaker Tells Confab,” *Newsday*, May 17, 1958.

<sup>118</sup> David L. Stebenne, *Arthur J. Goldberg: New Deal Liberal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 378.

<sup>119</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 241; Stan Hinden, “2 GOP Rebels Challenge Sprague; Hall,” *Newsday*, Jan. 16, 1959.

remain in Sprague's hands.<sup>120</sup> Joe Carlino was unhappy with Sprague's decision. He wanted to become chairman and began pressuring Patterson to resign. Patterson briefly fought back, but soon resigned allowing for Carlino's election as chairman. The entire incident completely soured Patterson on politics, and following his resignation as county chairman, he announced that he would not run for re-election for County Executive.<sup>121</sup>

As County Chairman, Carlino possessed all of the apparent qualities necessary to run the Nassau County machine: he was loyal to Sprague, he was a liberal Rockefeller Republican, and he supported organized labor. Politically, he followed "the lead of Dewey, Ives and Rockefeller."<sup>122</sup> Carlino was young, handsome, and articulate, and as an Italian-American, could appeal to Italian American voters, the largest single nationality in Nassau and Suffolk Counties.<sup>123</sup>

What Sprague and Carlino failed to see was that there had been tremendous change in the county and the country. There were now 1.3 million people in Nassau County—a ninety three per cent increase in just ten years.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, in 1960, John F. Kennedy was elected President. Compared to the stodgy old men of the Nassau County Party, Kennedy represented a new kind of candidate.

Once Carlino became the chairman of the County Republican Party, he and Sprague grappled with the need to find a candidate for county executive. This presented a challenge. Sprague and Hall had dominated Republican Party politics for decades, blocking the opportunity for political talent to rise. By failing to build a political bench, they faced difficulties when trying to find potential candidates willing and able to run for office. Sprague's refusal to give up his power over the party machine presented another complication. Any candidate for county executive had to be willing to concede power to Sprague.

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<sup>120</sup> Stan Hinden, "Hall, Sprague Say Adieu to Party Posts," *Newsday*, Sept. 18, 1959; George Wheeler, "'Nassau's GOP Machine: A 60 Year Dynasty,'" *Newsday* April 6, 1961; Bill Butler and Bob Caro, "Nassau's Job Plan Would Leave 2,400 Patronage 'Plums,'" *Newsday*, Feb. 11, 1960.

<sup>121</sup> Harrison, "Machine Politics," 245; Stan Hinden, "Patterson Will Quit 2 Top Jobs: Bows to Pressure By Carlino Forces," *Newsday*, April 6, 1961.

<sup>122</sup> Val Duncan, "Joe Carlino Is Moving-And Knows Where He Wants to Go: Joseph Carlino A Rising Star," *Newsday*, June 29, 1959.

<sup>123</sup> LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburbs*, 214.

<sup>124</sup> Shupe, ed., *Historical Population of Long Island*, x.

They had to accept that if they won, it would be Sprague who would retain control of political and government operations.

The race for county and local offices in 1961 was marked by Republican missteps and miscalculations.<sup>125</sup> Carlino and Sprague concluded that the best candidate for the Republican nomination for County Executive in 1961 was Robert W. Dill. Dill was a Collector for the Port of New York, a patronage position that he lost after Democrat John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States in 1960. Dill told Sprague, “He was interested in any job that was open.” But it was a complete surprise to Dill when Carlino and Sprague asked him to run for Nassau County Executive. He knew little about county government, knew none of the issues, and had never campaigned. Politically untested in the public arena, Dill blundered his way throughout the campaign.<sup>126</sup>

#### A New Alliance: Democrats and LIFED

As the Nassau County Democratic chair, Jack English did recognize the changes that were taking place in Nassau County. To head the Democratic ticket in 1961, the party nominated a man named Eugene Nickerson. Nickerson had a patrician bearing, and spoke with an affected New England accent. He was well educated and had attended school with President Kennedy. Some people said that he was “Kennedyesque,” while those who knew him remember Nickerson less kindly and saw him as an “imperious WASP” and “a bit of a snob.”<sup>127</sup>

English put together a strong and aggressive slate of Democratic candidates for town and county offices to run with Nickerson. Among them was Robert MacGregor, the business manager of the IBEW local at the Long Island Lighting Company, and the newly elected president of the Long Island Federation of Labor. MacGregor had always been a registered Republican, but when Oyster Bay Democrats offered

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<sup>125</sup> John M. Greene, “May 24, 1961: the Day the GOP Blundered,” *Long Island Daily Press*, Nov. 8, 1961.

<sup>126</sup> Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 249; Shelland, “The County Executive,” 84–85.

<sup>127</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 26, 2014; Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31, 2015; Richard O’Hara, interview by author, Jan. 12, 2015. On the campaign trail, Nickerson mimicked John F. Kennedy speech patterns and often reminded audiences that he and Kennedy were classmates at Harvard.

him the Democratic nomination as the candidate for Town Supervisor. A political scandal was brewing in town government, and while Oyster Bay had always been a solid Republican town, the time seemed ripe for a Democratic victory.<sup>128</sup> Intrigued and flattered, MacGregor switched his registration and accepted the nomination as the Democratic candidate for Oyster Bay Town Supervisor.

The choice of MacGregor by the Democrats was important for organized labor. During the 1961 election cycle, the Long Island Federation of Labor was looking for its political voice. In the past, union members, particularly the building trades, depended on the Board of Supervisors for their jobs and economic security. The new labor leaders at the helm of the Long Island Federation of Labor were, by necessity, “more worldly.”<sup>129</sup> Their focus was on factors outside of local politics. Many of them represented thousands of defense workers, and they were keenly aware of the necessity to build a political base to ensure that congressional candidates in Nassau County supported their agenda. In 1961, LIFED’s Committee on Political Education (COPE) became the instrument to elect candidates friendly to labor’s agenda.<sup>130</sup>

There was also a small group that was formed outside of LIFED and the Democratic Party. The group was motivated by the realization that the timing for a takeover of Nassau County by the Democrats was imminent. Justin Ostro said that as a union leader at Republic Aviation since 1950, he had long observed that workers at Republic Aviation were registering Republican but were voting Democrat. He surmised that if the unionized work force continued to grow as it had during the previous decade, it seemed likely that the Democrats could completely wrest control of the county away from the Republicans.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Dick Zander, “Dems May Pick Labor Chief To Oppose Burns,” *Newsday*, May 12, 1961.

<sup>129</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31, 2015.

<sup>130</sup> Bob Caro and Dick Estrin, “LI Labor Merges, Vows Political Action,” *Newsday*, Nov. 9, 1959; Bob Greene, “Labor Joins Fight to Beat Nassau GOP,” *Newsday*, Oct. 20, 1958.

<sup>131</sup> Email from Justin Ostro to author, Feb. 12, 2015; “Candidate Seeking Post to Abolish It,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1964; Bob Greene, one of the two reporters in the group, began his career investigating the Hague machine in Jersey City. He played a large role in the paper’s investigation of DeKoning in the fifties and broke the story about J. Russel Sprague’s secret racetrack holdings. In 1957, he took a leave of absence to work as an investigator for Robert Kennedy, who was counsel to the Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field. He returned to Long Island and *Newsday* in 1959 when he became involved with the Democratic group to elect Duggan as sheriff. The other reporter was Jim O’Neill, who had covered Long Island since the days of W. Kingsland Macy. Keeler. *A Candid History*, 259, 260, 296.

The group included Justin Ostro, the president of the IAM local at Republic; Charles Browne, President of Local 164 of the Hotel, Restaurant and Bartenders Union; Nassau Democratic Chairman Jack English; two *Newsday* reporters, Bob Greene and Jim O'Neill; and a Nassau County businessman named Sam Scibelli.<sup>132</sup>

They recognized that in order to win, it was necessary to strike at the heart of the Nassau County Republican's patronage machine. The first step in their plan to defeat the Republicans was to elect one of the members, a former federal narcotics agent named Tom Duggan, as the county sheriff. They had identified the sheriff's office as the "most potent tool of corrupt patronage in Nassau County." Taking control of the office of sheriff would go a long way in dismantling the GOP patronage machine.

The political winds were in their favor. Just before the election, *Newsday* endorsed Nickerson, emphasizing that the county needed a leader who made decision without "guidance from above," a thinly-veiled reference to Sprague.<sup>133</sup> The newspapers "attacked Sprague more than they attacked Dill," the hapless stand-in that Sprague and Carlino chose as the Republican candidate for County Executive. With accusations of "boss rule," linking a candidate to Sprague became a way to attack all Republicans.<sup>134</sup>

Eugene Nickerson won the 1961 election by sixty five hundred votes, and he became the first Democrat ever to hold the office of County Executive.<sup>135</sup> Although his was a great victory for the Democrats, the GOP was not totally broken. The party still had considerable strength, and the GOP won every other office in the county, including beating Robert MacGregor for Oyster Bay Town Supervisor. Tom Dugan lost, but Nickerson's victory convinced the Democrats that they could ultimately dismantle

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<sup>132</sup> Email from Justin Ostro to author, Feb 12, 2015. It would be several years before their plan came to fruition. Tom Dugan was elected as sheriff in 1964. But just eleven days after being elected, he suffered a fatal heart attack. After his death, the group lobbied for passage of what became known as the Tom Dugan bill that "created Nassau County Department of Corrections, with an appointed administrator and employees covered by Civil Service."

<sup>133</sup> Editorial. "For County Executive: Eugene H. Nickerson," *Newsday*, Oct. 31, 1961.

<sup>134</sup> Shelland, "The County Executive," 105.

<sup>135</sup> Stan Hinden, "Politicians View A New Terrain," *Newsday*, Nov. 16, 1961; "Voting In Nassau," *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 1961. The vote tally was Nickerson 215,601 and Dill 208,600. As County Executive, Nickerson became the presiding officer of the Board of Supervisors. There were five towns represented on the Board of Supervisors. Their votes were weighted according to their population. The one Democratic supervisor from Long Beach had only one vote. Nickerson had no vote unless there was a tie. "Nickerson Win Has Wide and Varied Effects," *Newsday*, Nov. 8, 1961.

the vice-like grip that the GOP had on the county Board of Supervisors, the villages, and the special districts. Voter registration remained overwhelmingly Republican, but the Democrats were heartened by the fact that the percentages were narrowing.<sup>136</sup> In their view, the election returns were a clear indication of a Democratic tide that would sweep them into every office in the county.<sup>137</sup>

It remains unclear whether or not Robert MacGregor received the support of the Federation of Labor during the campaign.<sup>138</sup> However, two weeks after his loss, the majority of the members of LIFED had an opportunity to express their feelings about his candidacy. MacGregor's term as president of the federation was due to expire in late November 1961. Because the office of president was largely ceremonial, and because no one had expressed any interest in challenging MacGregor for the seat, he believed that he would run for re-election unopposed. But when he arrived at the meeting, a confident MacGregor was blindsided by the announcement that he suddenly had an opponent.<sup>139</sup> The unions that had been formerly affiliated with the CIO were backing a challenger, Charles J. Browne. These CIO unions were joined by one former AFL union, the International Association of Machinists (IAM) local at Republic Aviation, led by Justin Ostro.<sup>140</sup> Unlike many of the other new leaders of the Long Island Federation of Labor, Browne was not associated with defense manufacturing. He was the President of Local 164 of the Hotel, Restaurant and Bartenders Union. Browne was a Democrat, but he also had a close relationship with Nassau GOP chairman Joe Carlino.<sup>141</sup> With connections to both political parties, supporters hailed Browne's election as "a new era of political action."<sup>142</sup>

The support of the IAM gave Browne enough votes to defeat MacGregor and become the new president of the LIFED. However, MacGregor was not simply pushed aside. Browne convinced newly-elected County Executive Eugene Nickerson to create a county Department of Labor Relations. With the unanimous support of the GOP-dominated Board of Town Supervisors, Nickerson appointed Robert

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<sup>136</sup> Rosenbaum, "The Political Consequences," 55.

<sup>137</sup> Nickerson Win Has Wide and Varies Effects," *Newsday*, Nov. 8, 1961.

<sup>138</sup> "Voting in Nassau," *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 1961. MacGregor Lost To Burns, 39,185 to 50,866.

<sup>139</sup> "Alice Murray, "MacGregor Upset Wracks Federation," *Newsday*, Nov. 24, 1961.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. Murray, "MacGregor Upset."

<sup>141</sup> Justin Ostro, interview with author, March 31, 2015.

<sup>142</sup> John Cummings, "See New Stress on Politics by LI Labor," *Newsday*, Nov. 25, 1961.

MacGregor as the county's first labor commissioner.<sup>143</sup> At mid-century, Ostro's dream of defense workers providing the base of a revived Democratic Party had become the stuff of Nassau Republicans' nightmares.



The Nassau-Suffolk CIO Council, November 8, 1959. From left to right: First row, Sol Molofsky, Retail-Wholesale Department Store Union, District 65, Rocco Campanaro, Business Manager Local 460 and Local 464, IUE, Jack Maltz, Retail-Wholesale Department Store Union, Local No. 286, Anthony Mazzocchi, vice-president of Local 8-149 of the Oil, Coke, and Atomic Workers. Top row from left to right: the first three are unidentified, fourth from left is Bernard O'Reilly, President of Local 661 of the United Auto Workers (UAW), Mimis Thierry, Insurance Workers International Union, Local No.5. (Campanaro Files).

<sup>143</sup> "Nassau Forms Labor Board," *Newsday*, Jan. 22, 1963. In neighboring Suffolk County, voters elected H. Lee Dennison as their first county executive. Dennison was a registered Republican who was recruited to run as a Democrat. One of his first actions was to step up the number of civil service steps "designed to abolish the provisional status of hundreds of Republican appointees." Art Bergmann, "Dennison Stepping Up Civil Service Reform," *New York Times*, Sept. 1, 1961.





Rocco Campanaro addressing the members of the CIO, November 8, 1959. The next day, the Long Island Federation of Labor was born. (Campanaro Files)

## *Chapter 6*

### *Turning Victory to Defeat*

Nickerson's 1961 election was a stunning victory for the Democrats. They believed that the mighty Republican machine had finally fallen. Their new partners were the union leaders representing the workers in the defense industry. While the Democrats controlled the county, they failed to build a political machine that could sustain their control. They allowed Republican appointees from the previous administration to keep their jobs and did not create new ones to reward their supporters, and failed to take control of the largest towns.<sup>1</sup> Their view patronage had a "pejorative implication" and lack of political sophistication in the ways of patronage and political machinations would soon affect them at the ballot box.<sup>2</sup>

Democrats also failed to recognize changes in the largest county employee's organization. Inspired by municipal workers in neighboring New York City, public sector workers in Nassau County began to strain under the yoke of patronage politics and began to organize. Nassau County's Civil Service Employees Association CSEA, which had an established relationship with the Republican machine and had been historically anti-union, changed its approach towards unionization and looked to establish the association as the bargaining representative for local government workers.

After suffering a defeat by the Democrats in the county, the Nassau Republicans were further trounced at the national convention by the conservative right wing of the party. On a national level, the Democratic Party promised a continuous flow of jobs for defense workers in Nassau County leading to electoral success again in 1964. The influence of the Nassau County Republicans on the national GOP was sorely diminished. But at home, they retained an iron grip on the political machine that they built in

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<sup>1</sup> Dick Zander, "Dems Facing Job Drought," *Newsday*, Nov. 6, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Ippolito, "Political Perspectives," 800–815. Unlike the Republicans, Democrats *suggested* that patronage workers contribute three per cent of their annual salary to the party, rather than demand the contributions as the Republicans did. Shelland, "The County Executive," 91.

the towns and villages. In Hempstead alone, the largest town in the county, there were enough jobs to go around to fill GOP patronage needs.<sup>3</sup>

With their patronage system intact, the Republican members of the Board of Supervisors made sure that county employees remained loyal to them. When public sector workers began to fight for collective bargaining rights, the Nassau County Republicans stepped forward to support their efforts. Nassau County Democrats, increasingly focused on national issues rather than local problems, began to bicker and disagree. As the decade drew to a close, they were divided into factions, unable to field a unified campaign for their candidates.

Democrats lost their allies in the Long Island Federation of Labor as well. As the defense industry continued to contract, industrial unions were reduced to only a few thousand members. Their leaders moved on, leaving the building trades to reclaim leadership in the federation. In less than ten years, the strong alliance of Nassau Democrats and organized labor that had emerged in 1961 was reduced to a pale shadow.

### The Democrats and the Defense Unions

For anyone listening close enough, the roar of the production lines in the county's defense industry plants was beginning to fade. It wasn't obvious at first. But jobs were disappearing, and more and more workers were being laid off. There had been layoffs in the past. Between 1953 and 1955, Arma laid off 2,000 workers.<sup>4</sup> Most were called back when work picked up, or they found jobs in one of the many other defense plants on the island. But a decade later, workers weren't just being laid off, they were being permanently let go. Plants were closing down, and so there were no other available jobs for the

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Eysen, "Money, Men and Patronage Oil Nassau County's GOP Machine," *Newsday*, March 11, 1973; Shelland, "The County Executive," 204.

<sup>4</sup> "Arma Corp. to Fire 500; Cite Lag in Defense Work," *Newsday*, March 15, 1955.

unemployed. The numbers told the story: in 1959, there were fifty seven hundred workers at Arma.<sup>5</sup> By 1965, the number of workers at the plant dropped to nine hundred.<sup>6</sup>

The full force of the sonic boom of unemployment was felt in 1962 when the Air Force suddenly announced it was no longer interested in purchasing the F-105D fighter bomber. The bomber was the main product manufactured at Republic Aviation, one of the largest union employers on the island. There was a note of finality in the announcement that left Republic's machinist union president Justin Ostro "extremely alarmed."<sup>7</sup>

To help save the thirteen thousand jobs at Republic and to have the Air Force reconsider their plans, Ostro called on Democratic and Republican leaders for help. He met with Republican State Assembly Speaker Joe Carlino and Otis Pike, the Democratic congressman from neighboring Nassau County.<sup>8</sup> Governor Rockefeller "stepped in," calling on Washington to intervene with the Defense Department. According to Ostro, political affiliation was irrelevant; what mattered was saving jobs. But the future prospects for Republic Aviation appeared dim.<sup>9</sup>

The situation was troubling for Republic workers because the union had just entered into negotiations for a new contract with the company. Realizing that the workforce might soon be facing massive unemployment, Ostro asked for an increase in supplemental unemployment insurance benefits. Republic management refused to even consider the request.

During the early spring the union voted to strike, and over the next seven weeks workers walked the picket line. Both sides refused to budge from their positions, and there appeared to be no end in sight.

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<sup>5</sup> Austin Perlow, "Business and Labor: Drive to Cut Work Week Backed by LI Union Chiefs," *Long Island Press*, March 8, 1959. The Bosch Arma Company was a manufacturer of electrical components for the defense industry. The national AFL-CIO pledged to lobby for an amendment the Fair Labor Standards Act to shorten the work week in order to create more jobs. On Long Island, AFL leader Robert MacGregor expressed skepticism that shorter work week would solve the growing unemployment problem. CIO Council leader Rocco Campanaro supported the concept of a shorter work week, but he saw automation as a much bigger threat to full employment. In 1961, there were 5,600 workers. Arma Strike Looms; Issue Is Seniority," *Newsday*, Sept. 29, 1964.

<sup>6</sup> "Arma Trims Operations, To Lay Off 200," *Newsday*, Oct. 6, 1964; "Arma Loses Titan Pact; 1,000 Layoff Looms," *Newsday*, Aug. 17, 1962. In 1964, the company lost an Air Force contract for the Titan III missile guidance system. The Defense Department decided to modify the Titan II system and awarded the contract to a company in Cleveland, Ohio.

<sup>7</sup> Leonard Baker, "Cutback Perils 9,000 Republic Jobs: Republic May Ax 9,000 by June 63," *Newsday*, Feb. 1, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Ostro said that Otis Pike was elected to congress in neighboring Suffolk County through the efforts of the Nassau County Democratic Party and the IAM. Justin Ostro, interview with author, March 31, 2015. Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31m 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Baker and Bob Greene, "Rocky Enters Fight for Republic Jobs," *Newsday*, Feb. 13, 1962.

Finally, in June, President Kennedy asked his secretary of labor, Arthur Goldberg, to invoke the Taft-Hartley Act and asked the courts to issue an injunction against the strike.<sup>10</sup> The union bitterly resented Kennedy's actions, but they were not deterred in pursuing their demands. Republic Aviation was a vital component of the economy of Nassau County, and the striking machinists "had tremendous public support in the community."<sup>11</sup> The strike finally ended in August 1962; the union won nineteen of their twenty demands.<sup>12</sup> Theirs was a major victory, raising the union's profile and that of the Long Island labor movement. Afterward, "JFK's people contacted the union," and a "groundswell of Democratic support emerged."<sup>13</sup> The machinists union's victory was attributed to the growing power of the Long Island Federation of Labor.

When the Federation of Labor was formed, one of its major goals had been to build a strong political program. Following the successful conclusion of the strike, candidates from both parties became "very deferential to labor," and an endorsement from the Federation of Labor was viewed as essential to a winning campaign.<sup>14</sup> One of the first candidates to come to Long Island to ask for their endorsement was the Democratic candidate for Governor, Robert M. Morgenthau.<sup>15</sup> The incumbent, Republican Governor Nelson Rockefeller, happened to be feuding with the State AFL-CIO, and Morgenthau hoped to exploit their falling out.<sup>16</sup>

Morgenthau already had some labor support in the state, but there were enough divisions within the labor movement over the endorsement for governor to cause the state AFL-CIO to remain neutral. Morgenthau arrived on Long Island with high hopes; after all, the president of the Long Island Federation, Charles Browne, had been an active Democrat during the 1961 county elections. But Browne had bad news to deliver, the Long Island Federation of Labor had decided to remain neutral in the race as well.

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<sup>10</sup> Leonard Baker, "Kennedy Orders Republic Writ: JFK Orders Writ in Republic Strike," *Newsday*, June 15, 1962; "Kennedy Acts to Invoke Taft-Hartley Law In Republic Aviation Strike; Names Board," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 8, 1962.

<sup>11</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, April 29, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Dick Kwartler and Caro, Robert, "Republic Aviation Strike Settled," *Newsday*, Aug. 3, 1962.

<sup>13</sup> Interview, Ostro. April 29, 2015

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Robert A. Caro and Stan Hinden, "LI Labor Neutral—Won't Back Morgy," *Newsday*, Oct. 22, 1962.

<sup>16</sup> "Dems Win UAW Backing, Lose Others," *Newsday*, Sept. 22, 1966.

Following their meeting, a photograph splashed across the pages of *Newsday* showing a crestfallen Morgenthau. Browne explained that while Long Island labor was “generally in favor of Democratic candidates,” Rockefeller was “respected.” Furthermore, Browne told him that he “didn’t know of a single Long Island labor leader” who was working in support of Morgenthau’s election.<sup>17</sup>

Supporting Rockefeller, the Long Island Federation of Labor’s followed the state AFL-CIO’s lead. It revealed that while almost all of the Labor Federation’s other endorsements in 1962 campaign were for Democratic congressional candidates on Long Island, the Nassau County labor movement continued to support Republicans on the state level.<sup>18</sup> Rockefeller’s popularity with Long Island labor leaders was due to the friendship he cultivated with them, regardless of their party affiliation. Rocco Campanaro had a “great” relationship with Rockefeller; he especially appreciated that Rockefeller was always honest and forthright. When Rockefeller didn’t support labor’s position on an issue, he would call Campanaro and explain his reasoning.<sup>19</sup> Justin Ostro was another labor leader who had a very good relationship with Rockefeller. Even though Ostro was a strong Democrat, Rockefeller appointed him to serve on several state committees.<sup>20</sup>

With labor’s support, Rockefeller handily won the 1962 gubernatorial election, taking both Nassau and Suffolk counties. But the Democrats were not without their own victory. In the race for State Comptroller, Democratic candidate Arthur Levitt carried Nassau County. His margin of victory was only 27,000 votes, but it was still a win—and for the Democrats, it was interpreted as a clear sign of their continued strength and the GOP’s weakening grip.<sup>21</sup>

During the 1963 town elections, Democrats were buoyed by their win in the Town of Oyster Bay. For over three decades, Oyster Bay had been the political base for the staunchly conservative former

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<sup>17</sup> “Dems Win UAW Backing,” Sept. 22, 1966; Caro, Hinden, “LI Labor ‘Neutral,’” Oct. 22, 1962.

<sup>18</sup> John Cummings, “GOP’s Grover Wins LI Labor Support,” *Newsday*, Oct. 12, 1962; Ibid. “LI Labor Neutral.” The federation endorsed Republican for congress from neighboring Suffolk County

<sup>19</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 26, 2014. This was in stark contrast to Rocco’s relationship with Mario Cuomo, Democratic Governor of New York from 1983 to 1994. Mrs. Campanaro remembers that Rocco grew to have little regard for Mario Cuomo who would often obfuscate and dissemble his positions on labor issues.

<sup>20</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> “The Swing In Politics: Progression of Power In County Leadership,” *Newsday*, Sept. 10, 1965; Harrison, “Machine Politics,” 218,250,268. The Nassau Republicans blamed Sprague for Levitt’s win.

Congressman Leonard Hall. But there was a growing scandal involving the Republican Town Supervisor and his alleged misuse of town funds. The trouble soon became fodder for the Democratic candidate, Michael Petito. He exploited the issue relentlessly, with the result that for the first time since 1929, Oyster Bay elected a Democratic Town Supervisor.<sup>22</sup>

From other quarters, however, there was darker news for the Democrats. One of their staunchest supporters, the president of the Long Island Federation of Labor, Charles Browne, was accused of mishandling union finances.<sup>23</sup> His full-time job was President of Local 164 of the Bartenders, Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, a local of approximately three thousand members. Trouble began inside his own local when a small group began to plot against him and seek his ouster. These accusations occurred just prior to the Long Island Federation of Labor convention at which Browne was to be re-elected as president. A headline saying, "FBI Opens Probe in LI Union Fight" was broadcast across the county, and suddenly both Democrat County Executive Eugene Nickerson and Republican County chairman Joe Carlino were too busy to attend the convention.<sup>24</sup> Despite their reticence to appear with Browne, he was re-elected to his second term as president of the federation.<sup>25</sup>

### Help From the Top

The real concern for organized labor in Nassau County was the continued drain of defense-related jobs off of the island.<sup>26</sup> Unemployment was rising precipitously; and by 1964, Rocco Campanaro said: "Things were bad three months ago. Today, they're worse. For Long Island, this is the worst it's ever been."<sup>27</sup> Justin Ostro remarked that the Island's economy was "sick." While John Egan, the president of

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<sup>22</sup> Stan Hinden, "Petito Wins in Oyster Bay, Only Dem Victor in Nassau: Dem Wins in Oyster Bay," *Newsday*, Nov. 6, 1963.

<sup>23</sup> The motivation for the lawsuit stemmed from a father-son rivalry for secretary-treasurer of the union. The younger Sheridan claimed that he had been duly elected. Joseph Gelmis, "Browne Pits Father Against Son," *Newsday*, Nov. 22, 1963; John Cummings, "FBI Opens Probe In LI Union Fight: Labor Chief Accused in Civil Suit," *Newsday*, Oct. 25, 1963. A month later, two members of the dissident group, led by a man named Jay Sheridan, filed assault charges against Browne. "New Rap Hits Browne," *Newsday*, Nov. 7, 1963.

<sup>24</sup> Art Bergmann, "A Newsday Profile: Tough Guy Under Fire," *Newsday*, Oct. 29, 1963.

<sup>25</sup> Art Bergmann, "Browne reelected to Top LI Labor Post," *Newsday*, Oct. 29, 1963.

<sup>26</sup> Milton Jacques, "U.S. Will Study LI \$ Woes, Labor Leaders Assured," *Long Island Press*, Jan. 23, 1964.

<sup>27</sup> Art Bergmann, and Robert A. Caro, "Talk Goes On-But Woes Mount," *Newsday*, Jan. 8, 1964.

Local 450 of the IUE at Sperry Gyroscope in Lake Success, observed that for each year from 1959 to 1964, one thousand workers had been laid off. By 1964, joblessness in the defense industry on Long Island had reached crisis proportions, and labor leaders recognized that “defense production as a major employer is on its way down for good.”<sup>28</sup>

Local banks were apparently wearing blinders. They issued rosy economic reports. The Long Island Association, an organization of over one thousand Long Island businesses, dismissed labor’s warnings. They claimed that “the economy is holding its own very well,” and that “the Island is still the fastest-growing industrial area in the eastern United States.”<sup>29</sup>

While area business leaders whistled in the wind, it was left to union leaders to lead the way in developing ideas on how to confront the island’s shaky economy and stem the outward flow of jobs. To address the problem, the Long Island Federation of Labor formed a Committee for Full Employment. Headed by Federation vice-presidents Anthony Mazzocchi and John Egan, the committee developed a plan: they proposed the machinery in the existing defense manufacturing plants be converted to produce consumer goods. In January 1964, they announced their proposals. They asserted the island’s “phenomenal growth has been due to the prosperity of the unionized defense worker,” and it was imperative to recognize that the “future of the Island is inexorably linked with their future.”<sup>30</sup>

With their proposal to convert defense plants to peacetime manufacturing in hand, a delegation of union leaders went to Washington to meet with Gardner Ackley, chairman of President Johnson’s Committee on Economic Conversion. Led by Federation president Charles Browne, the requested that the federal government impose a moratorium on layoffs in the defense industry. They also asked that the federal government to consider Long Island’s as a pilot program for their conversion plan. Ackley assured the men that the Johnson administration would study the problem. Ackley’s promises were not good enough for Charles Browne. Upon his return to Long Island, Browne “threatened to turn the

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Prussin, “Long Island Labor Sees End of Defense Boom,” *Long Island Press*, Jan. 23, 1964.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Collins, “LI Unions Choking On a White Collar,” *Newsday*, July 22, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Prussin, “LI Labor Sees End,” Jan. 23, 1964.



unemployment problem into a political issue,” saying that “In the months ahead, the federation will make Long Island’s No.1 problem—joblessness—into Long Island’s no. 1 political issue.”<sup>31</sup>

On February 18, 1964, another delegation of six leaders from the Long Island Federation of Labor went to Washington, DC. This time they were scheduled to meet directly with President Lyndon Johnson. Executive vice-president Rocco Campanaro led the delegation. He was joined by John Egan, IUE Local 450 president at Sperry Gyroscope; Paul Jennings, IUE Dist.3 executive secretary; Al Lowenstein, assistant to IUE District 3 President Milton Weihrauch; Justin Ostro, President of Local 1987 IAM; and Anthony Mazzocchi, vice-president of Local 8-149 of the Oil, Coke, and Atomic Workers.<sup>32</sup> At the meeting with the president, they again discussed using Long Island as a “national pilot program for converting local industry to a non-defense economy.” In addition, they asked the president to stop the defense industry from “sub-contracting work to ‘cheap-labor’ areas in the South and Southwest,” the area of the country represented by Barry Goldwater in the United States Senate.<sup>33</sup> The labor delegation received a sympathetic reception from President Johnson and left with the impression that their concerns would be given “top priority.”<sup>34</sup>

The building trades unions waited for help from the federal government as well. Cutbacks in defense spending had a deleterious impact on the building trades. With a weakened economy, local government and private industry were reluctant to embark on construction projects. The president of the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council said that during 1963, twenty per cent of the eighty thousand unionized construction workers on Long Island did not work more than twenty-six weeks that year, leaving them ineligible to collect unemployment benefits.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jacques, “US Will Study LI \$ Woes,” Jan. 23, 1964.

<sup>32</sup> “Johnson Hears Long Island Jobless Story From IUEers,” *IUE News*, Feb. 27, 1964; Leonard Baker, “LI Unionists See LBJ, Ask Industry Aid,” *Newsday*, February 19, 1964; “Ask Johnson to Make LI Test Area for Industry,” *Long Island Press*, Feb. 19, 1964.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. “Ask Johnson to Make LI Test.”

<sup>34</sup> The six men attending were Executive Director Rocco Campanaro, IUE Local 460, Federations Executive Vice-President, John Egan, IUE Local 450 president, Paul Jennings, IUE District 3 Executive Secretary, Al Loewenthal, Assistant to the President of District 3, Justin Ostro, IAM Local 1987 President, and Anthony Mazzocchi, Vice-President of Local 8-149 Oil, Coke, and Atomic Workers. Ibid, “Johnson Hears Long Island.”

<sup>35</sup> Art Bergmann and Robert Caro, “Talk Goes On—But Woes Mount,” *Newsday*, Jan. 8, 1964.

### Organizing the Public Sector

While trying to stanch the outflow of defense jobs from Nassau County, the Long Island Federation of Labor turned to organizing the many public sector workers in Nassau County. There were 8,000 workers employed by the county, and there were an additional 10,000 workers in the districts, villages, and towns. While some of those public sector employees were hired through the civil service system, many worked as provisional or temporary employees. None of them belonged to a labor union.

In 1964, Vincent Castiglione, an organizer from AFSCME District Council 37 (DC 37) in New York City, arrived on Long Island to organize public employees. The plan was simple: organize the blue collar workers first, and then to move on to organize the rest of Long Island's county, town, and village workers. Approximately 6,000 Nassau County employees already belonged to the Civil Service Employees Association CSEA, but Castiglione "sneered" at considering the association as resembling anything close to a union and said that they were "agents for the bosses. They're an insurance agency and nothing else. They don't believe in collective bargaining."<sup>36</sup> The Long Island Federation of Labor backed AFSCME's organizing drive, but the union failed to gain a foothold on Long Island.

Their efforts may have been short-lived, but DC 37 served to inspire the Executive Board of the Federation to develop its own "plan of action" to organize the public sector. The Long Island Federation of Labor submitted a proposal to the national AFL-CIO for funding and staff. Their plan was approved, and soon after, the executive board announced that they "were ready to go" to organize Nassau County public employees.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, an "insurmountable obstacle" quickly arose. LIFED's affiliated unions began to argue with one another, each one claiming jurisdiction over organizing municipal workers. Realizing that the issue could not be peacefully resolved, the Federation dropped the idea of a coordinated organizing campaign, concluding that "each union in the field should organize county and municipal

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<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Crowe, "Long Island Labor," *Newsday*, Nov. 20, 1964.

<sup>37</sup> "Long Island Labor," Ibid. Archie Cole. (ed.) "2 Years of Progress." Report to the Fifth Biennial Convention. Long Island Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO. October 25-27, 1965-1967. Lake Kiamesha, NY: 49-51.

workers on its own.” Disappointed, organizers stated that after all of their hope and work, it was “an unsatisfactory conclusion, to say the least.”<sup>38</sup>

### Landslide

Despite the shaky economy and the promises from President Johnson to help Long Island, Nassau County Republicans were still confident that they would win the election in 1964. Registered Republicans outnumbered Democrats by 338,074 to 183,693 in the county.<sup>39</sup> The Republican Board of Supervisors made sure to shore up their base by authorizing a pay raise for county employees. Nickerson claimed to support the raise; but because he disagreed on the source of the funding in the county budget, he vetoed it.<sup>40</sup>

The GOP ignored the fact that the Long Island Federation of Labor endorsed Democrat Eugene Nickerson for re-election as County Executive and assumed that workers on Long Island would support their candidates on the national level.<sup>41</sup> They failed to recognize the tension and insecurity that unionized workers in the defense industry were experiencing as they watched their good-paying jobs disappear. At Sperry alone, fifteen thousand workers belonged to the IUE. At Republic Aviation there were approximately sixteen thousand members of the Machinists Union.<sup>42</sup> The Long Island Federation of Labor had a membership of 160,000.<sup>43</sup> Though their numbers were diminishing, Democrats and union leaders thought that if they could persuade these unionized workers that their candidates would save their jobs, they could win the election.

Among the Republicans, the conventional political wisdom was that Rockefeller, an “Eisenhower Republican,” had the nomination “all sewn up.”<sup>44</sup> While he failed to get the nomination in 1960, this time, he was determined to succeed. Among his opponents was Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, an

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. “2 Years of Progress,” 49–51.

<sup>39</sup> Shelland, “The County Executive,” 109.

<sup>40</sup> “Nick Vetos (sic) GOP Salary Bill; GOP Nixes Nick Appointment,” *Newsday*, April 22, 1964.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Collins, “LI Unions Choking On a White Collar,” *Newsday*, July 22, 1963.

<sup>43</sup> Art Bergmann, “A Newsday Profile: Tough Guy Under Fire,” *Newsday*, Oct. 29, 1963.

<sup>44</sup> Cox-Richardson. *To Make Men Free*, 267.

unabashed conservative, whose views were anathema to the moderate wing of the Republican Party.

Goldwater was virulently anti-labor; he not only supported Taft-Hartley, but was also a key advocate of national right-to-work legislation.<sup>45</sup>

As Dewey's ideological heir, Rockefeller supported organized labor and gambled that Goldwater's harsh, anti-labor positions would cost him the Republican nomination. He called Goldwater's supporters the "radical right" and "terrorists" who represented the "lunatic fringe;" and he pointed out that anti-union organizations such as the John Birch Society were organizing for Goldwater. Joining him in his anti-Goldwater animus was New York's Republican Senator, Jacob Javits, whose view of Goldwater's candidacy were equally harsh: he called Goldwater's campaign "the beginnings of American totalitarianism."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Can Right-to-Work Issue Work for Rocky: Looking at Past Political," *Newsday*, Nov. 2, 1963; Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Nation Books, 2009), 32.

<sup>46</sup> Stan Hinden, "Rocky Launches Attack On GOP Right-Wingers," *Newsday*, July 15, 1963; Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: the Making of the Conservative Movement From the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 138.



A delegation of LIFED representatives met with President Lyndon Johnson on February 18, 1964, to discuss establishing a pilot program on Long Island to convert defense manufacturing to peacetime purposes. Attending the meeting were Executive Vice-President Rocco Campanaro; Anthony Mazzocchi, Vice-President of Local 8-149 of the Oil, Coke, and Atomic Workers; John Egan, IUE Local 450 President at Sperry Gyroscope; Paul Jennings, IUE Dist.3 Executive Secretary; Al Lowenstein, assistant to District 3 President Milton Weihrauch; Justin Ostro, Local 1987 IAM. (Campanaro Files).

During the first six months of 1964, Rockefeller campaigned hard for the nomination. But after a series of missteps, it was clear he would not receive the support necessary for the nomination, and he dropped out of the race. He declared his support for Pennsylvania Governor William Scranton, another moderate Republican. In a move that displayed his liberal leanings, Rockefeller pledged to strengthen the civil rights plank of the GOP platform at the Republican National Convention.<sup>47</sup>

Republican State Assembly Speaker Joe Carlino, the chairman of the Nassau County GOP, attended the national convention as a Rockefeller-Scranton delegate.<sup>48</sup> Appointed by Rockefeller to serve on the Platform Committee, Carlino introduced a plank that called for federal enforcement of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.<sup>49</sup> Goldwater had voted against the 1964 Civil Rights Act, arguing that the act was a violation of states' rights.<sup>50</sup> Carlino's proposal was considered a direct affront to Goldwater. The party had turned to the right, and Goldwater received the endorsement for president.

Upon his return to Nassau County, Carlino refused to campaign for Goldwater.<sup>51</sup> He faced challenges from a small but vocal group of conservatives in the Nassau Republican Party who began to search for a way to break the grip that the Rockefeller wing had on Nassau County. Unable to gain traction in the mainstream Nassau GOP, they turned instead to a third party, the Conservative Party. New York had a long history of third parties and cross-endorsements. Former New York City Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia ran with the support of several major and minor parties as a Fusion candidate during the 1930s.<sup>52</sup> On Long Island, the American Labor Party ran pro-labor candidates. However, there was an

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<sup>47</sup> Norton Smith, *On His Own Terms*, 803–804, 817–818, 1011–1013; Heather Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free*, 268; Harvey Aronson, "Rocky's Swan Song: The Old Mainstream," *Newsday*, June 16, 1964.

<sup>48</sup> "Carlino Declines to Say If He'd Back Goldwater," *New York Times*, June 29, 1964. During the months running up to the convention, Carlino refused to publicly support Goldwater. "Carlino To Head G.O.P. Convention: Assembly Speaker Is Named Permanent Chairman," *New York Times*, Aug. 28, 1962.

<sup>49</sup> Warren Weaver Jr., "Carlino May Get Major G.O.P. Post: Rockefeller Is Said to Have Chosen," *New York Times*, Feb. 20, 1964; "Carlino To Head G.O.P. Rights Unit: Named to Help Shape Plank," *New York Times*, July 18, 1960.

<sup>50</sup> Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 363.

<sup>51</sup> Retrieved from: [http://liherald.com/stories/Joseph-Carlino-9-remembered-as-a-politicalgiant,7286?page=2&content\\_source=:;Ippolito](http://liherald.com/stories/Joseph-Carlino-9-remembered-as-a-politicalgiant,7286?page=2&content_source=:;Ippolito), "Political Perspectives," 45.

<sup>52</sup> Golway, *Machine Made*. 295–299. Between 1936 and 1947, New York's city council members were elected in proportion to the votes of each party. With twenty-seven city council members, a minor party was assured of getting a seat on the council. Voice. LaGuardia once ran for mayor on four different party lines. Richard Heinrich McDonnell, "A History of the Conservative Party of New York State" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1975), 8–9.

underlying suspicion of political parties, and many villages mandated that local candidates run in non-partisan elections.<sup>53</sup>

In Nassau County's town and countywide races, the Conservative Party faced an uphill climb. During the 1962 elections, the Conservatives garnered only 3.8 per cent of the vote state-wide. The following year, they did only slightly better when they began to campaign for local office on a "neighborhood schools" platform against busing.<sup>54</sup> *Newsday* was hostile and soundly criticized them, linking them to the John Birch Society.<sup>55</sup>

To gain the support of Long Island labor, politicians of all stripes wanted to be viewed as moderates. Even Goldwater supporters tried to burnish Goldwater's union credentials. One of them sent a letter to the editor claiming that the Arizona senator could not be accused of being anti-union because he was a member of the Musicians Union AFL-CIO. The writer argued that Goldwater had "silent" labor support because the rank and file was intimidated by Nassau County labor leaders who used "threats of loss of jobs, or force or other intimidation methods" to silence them. The paper's editor dismissed the writer's claims, pointing out that Goldwater was only an honorary member of the Tucson branch of the Musicians Union in 1959, not a full-fledged unionist. Moreover, the Musicians Union had not endorsed any candidate for president.<sup>56</sup>

During the 1964 campaign, Democrats were energized. One of the high points came when Robert Kennedy, the Democratic candidate for United States Senate from New York, visited Long Beach. Kennedy was not just a political candidate, he was a celebrity. Accompanied by Nassau County Executive Eugene Nickerson, Kennedy was greeted by mobs of supporters.<sup>57</sup> Among them was Republican William DeKoning, Jr. By the 1964 election, DeKoning had once again risen to leadership in the Operating Engineers Union in Nassau County. DeKoning and candidate Robert Kennedy were not on friendly terms.

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<sup>53</sup> "Hub ALP Formed, Backs Mirschel," *Newsday*, Feb. 19, 1943. The ALP candidates never won election to any office. They had a small membership and ran endless primaries against their "right" wing and their "left" wing.

<sup>54</sup> Stan Hinden, "Petito Wins in Oyster Bay, Only Dem Victor in Nassau: Dem Wins in Oyster Bay," *Newsday*, Nov. 6, 1963.

<sup>55</sup> Timothy J. Sullivan, *New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism: Redrawing Party Lines* (Albany, New York: SUNY Albany, 2009), 17.

<sup>56</sup> "A Smear of Duggan," *Newsday*, Oct. 29, 1964.

<sup>57</sup> R.W. Apple Jr., "Throngs Mob Kennedy at Beach: Kennedy Mobbed On L.I. Beaches," *New York Times*, Sept. 7, 1964.

During the late 1950s, when Kennedy served as chief counsel of the Senate Labor Rackets Committee, Kennedy described both father and son as “evil.”<sup>58</sup> But the situation had changed and labor support in Nassau County was essential to winning the election. During his tour of Long Island, Robert Kennedy pulled up a “broadly grinning” William DeKoning, Jr. onto a platform and introduced him as “a friend.”<sup>59</sup>

What became abundantly clear during the 1964 campaign was that in Nassau County, radicals from both sides of the aisle were rejected. When Anthony Mazzocchi, one of the founders of the Long Island Federation of Labor’s Committee on Political Education (COPE), wanted to run for Congress against Goldwater supporter Steven Derounian, Democratic Chairman English refused to support him. He viewed Mazzocchi as a radical and too much of a renegade.<sup>60</sup> LIFED Executive Vice-President Rocco Campanaro viewed Mazzocchi as a “gadfly” who “never wanted to compromise.”<sup>61</sup>

On the evening of November 3, 1964, as the election results began to trickle into headquarters, county GOP leaders were shocked. The Democratic presidential candidate, Lyndon Johnson, swept Nassau County. He won the county decisively, beating Goldwater 380,338 to 251,086. His victory was the first time since 1912 that a Democrat had won a presidential race in Nassau County.<sup>62</sup> Democrat Lester Wolfe, a little-known Nassau County Democrat, defeated Nassau County Congressman Steven Derounian, a strong supporter of Barry Goldwater. Even worse news for the GOP political machine was that Thomas Dugan was elected county sheriff, the first step in the plan first formulated by Browne, Ostro, and English in 1961 to dismantle the GOP patronage system.<sup>63</sup>

Nassau County Republicans blamed the right wing of the GOP for their losses, saying, “this sweeping Democratic victory suggested that Goldwater’s brand of Republicanism did not appeal to

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Kennedy, *The Enemy Within: The McClellan’s Committee Crusade Against Jimmy Hoffa and Corrupt Labor Unions*, New York: DeCapo Press, 1960, 1994.199.

<sup>59</sup> Kenneth Crowe, “Long Island Labor,” *Newsday*, Oct. 2, 1964.

<sup>60</sup> Leopold, *The Man Who Hated Work*, 160.

<sup>61</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 26, 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Stan Hinden, “Nick In, Carlino Out; Dems Take 3 LI Congress Seats: LBJ Carries In,” *Newsday*, Nov. 4, 1964; Ronald Maiorana, “G.O.P. Loses Nassau,” *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1964.

<sup>63</sup> “Nassau Names a Successor to Stricken Sheriff: Police Inspector Is,” *New York Times*, Jan. 13, 1965. There were approximately 100 men who worked at the county jails. All were politically appointed and all were Republicans. Soon after he was elected, Duggan suddenly died. However, the Duggan bill was passed by the state legislature mandating that the corrections officers and employees of the sheriff’s department be hired through the civil service system.



Nassau voters.”<sup>64</sup> But it didn’t explain why Rockefeller Republican Joe Carlino also lost his re-election to the State Assembly.<sup>65</sup> Carlino lost for a number of reasons. His opponent, Gerald McDougal, was a former Republican turned Democrat. For years, Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Carlino. McDougal simply reversed the strategy and encouraged Republicans to cross party lines to vote for a Democrat.<sup>66</sup> The Democrats also worked actively on registering voters. During the campaign, Democratic leader Jack English announced that in each of the twenty two election districts represented by Carlino, the party had registered 200 new voters.<sup>67</sup>

The election of 1964 proved that Nassau County Democrats would no longer be marginalized, and that “being a democrat was now respectable.”<sup>68</sup> Though Republican committeemen still pressured new arrivals who moved from the city to Long Island to register with the GOP, it was obvious that party registration wasn’t translating to votes on Election Day.

But it was Carlino himself who was blamed for the loss of local Republican candidates. He was accused of being weak, and the GOP committee lost confidence in Carlino’s ability to lead the party. What’s more, some of the more conservative Republicans regarded Carlino as entirely too liberal, and they were angry that Carlino refused to support Goldwater during the campaign. With attacks coming at him from all fronts, he managed to fend off an immediate challenge to his leadership and resolved to serve out his term until it ended in 1965.<sup>69</sup>

### Browne’s Troubles

Carlino wasn’t the only political player facing bad news. Browne’s problems within his union, Local 164 of the Bartenders, Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, that began after the local elections

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<sup>64</sup> Maiorana, “G.O.P. Loses Nassau,” Nov. 4, 1964; Hinden, “Nick In, Carlino Out Nick In.”

<sup>65</sup> Laymond Robinson, “Upset At Albany: Carlino and Mahoney Defeated,” *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 1964.

<sup>66</sup> Maiorana “G.O.P. Loses Nassau,” Nov. 4, 1964.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Kihss, “Democrats Voice Hope On Suburbs: They Say High Registration May Bring G.O.P. Loss,” *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 1964.

<sup>68</sup> Clarence Dean, “Disunity in G.O.P. Reflects New Structure of Suburbs: G.O.P. Split Shows Suburbs’ Change,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1964.

<sup>69</sup> Roy R. Silver, “County Leaders Support Carlino: Dissatisfaction Noted, but Ouster Move Dies,” *New York Times*, June 10, 1964.

the year before, escalated. The international union placed the local in a trusteeship and scheduled an election for a new president to replace him. As if things couldn't get worse, Local 923 of the Culinary Workers Union of New York launched an organizing drive to raid his local union.<sup>70</sup>

Members of the Long Island Federation of Labor and the Building Trades rallied around Browne. He was a charismatic leader, described as “big and burly” with a “colorful” manner of speaking. According to newspaper accounts, he was “flamboyant” and “one of the most popular leaders on the Island” with a good sense of humor.<sup>71</sup> Once, when he introduced Assembly Speaker Joe Carlino, his audience exploded in laughter when he said, “Look you guys, this here’s no ordinary gorilla what just climbed down out of a coconut tree, and this here’s a friend of labor, Joe Carlino.”<sup>72</sup> In the spring of 1964, the Nassau-Suffolk Building and Construction Trades Council, sponsored a testimonial dinner in Browne’s honor. Even the county politicians came around. Democratic County Chairman Jack English and the Republican County chairman, Joe Carlino, served as co-chairmen of the event.<sup>73</sup>

But Browne had been stripped of his union job with the Restaurant Workers Union; and with the cloud of an indictment hanging over his head, Browne went to Florida to find work. He had been a strong leader, and in his absence the Federation faltered. With no leadership, the Building Trades decided to pull out of the Federation. By the end of 1964, Federation leaders decided that Browne could no longer serve as president. They felt that even though he was in Florida, “his continued presence as president was embarrassing the federation and hampering its relations with public officials.”<sup>74</sup> In January 1965, a small group flew to Florida to ask Browne for his resignation.<sup>75</sup> When they returned, they announced that Browne had agreed to quit.

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<sup>70</sup> Edward G. Smith, “Browne Local Faces Threat of a New Union,” *Newsday*, Jan. 27, 1964.

<sup>71</sup> John Cummings, “LI Labor Chief: A New Breed of Leader,” *Newsday*, Dec. 7, 1965. Despite these attributes, none of the people that were interviewed remember him.

<sup>72</sup> Art Bergmann, “A Newsday Profile: Tough Guy Under Fire,” *Newsday*, Oct. 29, 1963.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Mayer, “Indictment Won’t Halt Browne Tribute,” *Newsday*, May 2, 1964.

<sup>74</sup> Robert A. Caro, “Browne Agrees to Quit as LI Labor President,” *Newsday*, Jan. 30, 1965; Jon Margolis, “Labor on Long Island: Who’s Who,” *Newsday*, Jan. 28, 1969.

<sup>75</sup> Kenneth Crowe, “Long Island Labor,” *Newsday*, Dec. 18, 1964.

In February, Browne suddenly returned to Long Island, and to everyone's surprise, he announced that talk of his resignation had been premature. Not only did Browne intend to remain as president of the Federation: he also planned to run for president of his former union, Local 164. The union election was scheduled to be held in late April, and rumors surfaced that he would run for president with Justin Ostro as his running mate. Ostro served as president of the IAM local at Republic Aviation, but he was also a dues-paying member of the Bartenders Union and was eligible to run for office.<sup>76</sup>

Just days before the election, in another move that surprised everyone, Browne suddenly dropped out of the race. He had accepted a new job with the Seafarers Union. Justin Ostro the president of the machinists local dismissed the suggestion that he become the new president of the bartenders' union saying, "You can't do justice to two full-time jobs."<sup>77</sup>

Browne's term as president of the Long Island Federation of Labor was set to expire in the fall of 1965. After declining to run for re-election, he faded from the headlines. Two years later, he went to trial on the charges of abusing union finances. During the trial, his accusers recanted, and instead testified on Browne's behalf.<sup>78</sup> Vindicated, Browne was acquitted on all counts, but it was too late. His role in the Long Island labor movement had ended.

With his big personality, Browne had run the Federation like a one-man show. Though he was closely aligned with the Democratic Chairman Jack English, it was under Browne's watch that the Federation endorsed political candidates from both parties as long as they supported labor's agenda. By helping to build the Long Island Federation into a powerful political organization that was not beholden to either party, Browne left a lasting legacy.

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<sup>76</sup> "Machinists' Ostro Put in Race for 2 Bartender Union Posts," *Newsday*, April 6, 1965. Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 31, 2015.

<sup>77</sup> "Browne Suddenly Quits Union Contest," *Newsday*, April 8, 1965.

<sup>78</sup> "Acquit Ex-LI Labor Chief in Funds Case," *Newsday*, Oct. 18, 1967.

### Wearing Down the Democrats-Labor Alliance

Following the 1964 Democratic victory on Long Island, a new election cycle began. In Nassau County, politicians from both parties clamored for the Federation's endorsement. Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, who had his eye on the 1968 Democratic nomination for President of the United States, came to breakfast with the Island's union leaders.<sup>79</sup> Robert Kennedy, who won his election as Senator from New York in 1964, became a frequent guest at the federation's events. He often came to speak with the island's labor leaders and developed a close relationship with Executive Vice-President, Rocco Campanaro.<sup>80</sup> Republican Governor Nelson Rockefeller also became a frequent visitor.<sup>81</sup>

Following the scandal surrounding Browne's resignation, the LIFED Executive Board determined that there was too much power concentrated in the office of president; they decided that his replacement should have limited authority. The Board decided instead to increase Rocco Campanaro's role as manager of the Federation's day-to-day operations. They further demarcated the president's role by expanding the Board's oversight powers.<sup>82</sup> These changes equalized the political importance of executive board members, forcing politicians to seek the good will and support of more than just one union leader.

This new role was reflected in the Board's choice to be the new president, Toby Coletti. Coletti was the president of Local 342 of the Meatcutters Union which had been affiliated with the AFL. Former AFL unions had a much larger membership on Long Island than the CIO locals, and there were still some AFL leaders, especially those in the building trades, who were reluctant to support a former CIO leader as president.

The choice of Coletti as the new president would have a profound effect, not just the Federation, but on the future of the Nassau Democratic Party. As a full-time representative for the Meatcutters, Coletti collected no salary from the Federation. His only compensation was one hundred dollars per week

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<sup>79</sup> Letter from Hubert Humphrey to Rocco Campanaro Aug. 30, 1965. Given to author by Lurana Campanaro, Aug 26, 2014.

<sup>80</sup> The Campanaro's would have cocktails with Bobby and his wife Ethel. Kennedy often attended events sponsored by the Long Island Federation of Labor. Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 26, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> John Cummings, "I Labor Chief: A New Breed of Leader," *Newsday*, Dec. 7, 1965.

for expenses.<sup>83</sup> Unlike Browne, Coletti was mild-mannered. He was also politically weak with little influence or experience outside of the Meatcutters Union. His union, Local 342, was a regional union with fifteen thousand members. His members were employed in multiple shops scattered throughout Queens, Brooklyn, Long Island, and Staten Island. Contracts were negotiated with individual employers, and there had been no need for Coletti to amass political capital or form relationships with politicians.

Coletti's anemic leadership of the Long Island Federation of Labor created the perfect opportunity for DeKoning to spread his wings. At around the same time, rumors began to surface that DeKoning had intentions of taking over the Nassau Suffolk Building Trades Council. The president of the council, John "Buddy" Long had been in office since 1948, when he ousted DeKoning's father. Long was up for re-election in July of 1964, and for the first time in his career as a union leader, he was facing opposition. There were rumors that his opponent, a member of Steamfitters Local 638 from New York City, was really a stand-in for William DeKoning, Jr.<sup>84</sup> As his election neared, construction union leaders rallied to his support. His opponent dropped out of the race, and Long was re-elected as head of the Council.<sup>85</sup>

The presidency of the council was also not a full-time job, and came with no salary, only expenses. The by-laws governing the Council required that the president have outside employment, and as president, Buddy Long's full-time work was the Business Manager of Bricklayers Local 30, an elected office that he had first won in 1947. Six months after his re-election as president of the Building Trades Council in July of 1964, an opponent suddenly emerged to challenge him as business manager of his local.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Cummings, "LI Labor Chief," Dec. 7, 1965.

<sup>84</sup> Pat Patterson, "Mob Makes LI Move," *Newsday*, June 12, 1964. Rumors surrounding Long's opponent was that he was associated with mob elements from New York City as well as being the front for William DeKoning, Jr.

<sup>85</sup> John Cummings, "Long Beats Mob's Man in Vote by Trade Unions," *Newsday*, July 2, 1964.

<sup>86</sup> Kenneth Crowe, "Profile: David Leonard," *Newsday*, Dec. 15, 1964.

In December 1964, Long lost his job by thirty-five votes.<sup>87</sup> Since he was no longer employed by his union, he became ineligible to serve as president of the Building Trades Council. His friends and allies in the Building Trades Union looked for ways to reinterpret the rules that might allow him to stay in office, but he was ultimately forced to resign. By the spring of 1965, his support eroded, and Long finally left, leaving the door open for other candidates to step forward to run for election as president.<sup>88</sup>

Jockeying to the front was William DeKoning, Jr.<sup>89</sup> DeKoning's past continued to haunt him and there was speculation that he had been the mastermind behind Long's ouster.<sup>90</sup> However, DeKoning contended that he and his father had been railroaded, and he worked hard to "restore the family name."<sup>91</sup> Despite his past and its history of questionable activities, DeKoning was elected as the new president of the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council in April 1965.<sup>92</sup>

Like his father, DeKoning looked to organize workers. He recognized public sector workers need for union representation. Just over the Nassau border in neighboring Suffolk County, the local CSEA president was challenged by the Operating Engineers to represent workers in the Babylon Town Highway Department. This organizing campaign illustrated how DeKoning and the Republicans maintained a strong alliance. The Town Board was Republican-controlled, and so the CSEA president, who was a long-time member of the Republican Party, assumed that the Town Board would reject the Operating

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<sup>87</sup> Kenneth Crowe and Jack Schwartz, "Long Defeated; 18-Yr. Union Control Ends," *Newsday*, Dec. 14, 1964. The local consisted of one thousand members and Long was defeated by thirty-five votes. "Union Leader demands That Long Quit Post," *Newsday*, Dec. 16, 1964.

<sup>88</sup> Kenneth Crowe and Jack Schwartz, "Long Defeated," Dec. 14, 1964; "Buddy Long Starts Fight for Union Job," *Newsday*, Jan. 5, 1965. Long could have stayed on if the newly-elected business agent of the Bricklayers Union, David Leonard, gave Long a paid position as a union delegate. Leonard refused to do so. "Long Keeps Labor Post," *Newsday*, Jan. 7, 1965. The interpretation of whether or not the Trades Council constitution specifically required that the officer be a paid delegate of a union was debated. The headquarters of the bricklayers union was in New York City and it was from that office that a final decision was made rejecting Long's employment by the local. Buddy Long, he was rewarded by Governor Rockefeller for his twenty years of loyalty to the GOP and appointed as the statewide manpower consultant for the Office of Economic Opportunity. "Gov Names Union Exec," *Newsday*, July 7, 1967.

<sup>89</sup> Bob Greene, "Long Quits labor Post; Sees DeKoning As Chief," *Newsday*, Feb. 4, 1965. In 1958 he was elected business manager of Local 138 of the Operating Engineers. "Head Of L. I. Union Pledges Reforms: DeKoning Tells Senators He Will," *New York Times*, Jan 25, 1958. Officers in the local were not elected but appointed. U.S. Congress. Interim Report of the Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor Management Field. United States Senate pursuant to S. Res. 74 and 221, 85th Congress. March 24 (Legislative Day March 17), 1958. Rept. 1417-404-412. U.S.G.P.O.

<sup>90</sup> In an unmarked newspaper clipping in the Rocco Campanaro files, a reporter writes that "DeKoning has been less than a model citizen." However, the article quotes an anonymous labor man as stating that DeKoning was "very reasonable," who "works like a dog to get big jobs into the area."

<sup>91</sup> Bob Greene, "LI racketeer Eyes Bigger Job," *Newsday*, March 29, 1965.

<sup>92</sup> Bob Greene, "DeK Jr. Takes Over As LI Council Chief," *Newsday*, April 8, 1965. Zander, Dick, "DeK Bares Plan for LI Labor Lobbyist," *Newsday*, July 14, 1965.

Engineers petition for a representation election. To his surprise, the board voted to permit an election. While CSEA had a long history of dealing with local Republicans, its ties were not stronger than William DeKoning's, and CSEA lost the election. Suspecting that DeKoning had interfered, the local CSEA president claimed that board members were unduly "pressured" but refused to say by whom, only implying that it was DeKoning.<sup>93</sup>

Soon after, the Building Trades Council rejoined the Federation. Irwin Fleischer, the secretary-treasurer of the Building Trades Council, was elected to the Federation's Executive Board.<sup>94</sup> Both became active participants in the federation's activities and began to play a prominent political role.<sup>95</sup>

There were other changes within the Long Island Federation of Labor. One by one, the leaders of the defense and industrial unions left Long island. Anthony Mazzocchi went to work as the Director of the Citizen-Legislative Department of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers in Washington, D.C. Justin Ostro, president of Republic's IAM Local 1987, once the largest local union on Long Island, whose membership had dwindled to 3,400, was offered a job on the IAM national staff and went to service a local district in Connecticut.<sup>96</sup> Mazzocchi and Ostro had been active in the Democratic Party and helped to shape the Federation's political program. Mazzocchi was responsible for building LIFED's Committee On Political Education (COPE), while the Democrats victory in 1961 was due to the efforts of union leaders like Ostro. Later, his union helped organize teachers, and was responsible for the election of a Democratic County sheriff.<sup>97</sup> The ties between federation leadership and the Democratic Party were fraying. With DeKoning back in charge of the building trades, labor support in the upcoming elections appeared to be up for grabs.

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<sup>93</sup> Art Bergmann, "Inside Politics: One Man's Fight With City Hall," *Newsday*, Oct. 6, 1966.

<sup>94</sup> "2 Years of Progress." Report to the Fifth Biennial Convention. Archie Cole. (ed.), Long island Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO. October 25-27, 1967. Lake Kiamasha, NY.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. "2 Years of Progress." DeKoning appears in many of the photos in the convention report.

<sup>96</sup> Linda Charlton. "Ostro Quits as Chief of Republic Union," *Newsday*, March 3, 1966;

<sup>97</sup> Leopold, *The Man Who Hated Work*, 140.



A scene from the LIFED 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention held in Kiamesha Lake, NY. Newly-elected Executive Director Rocco Campanaro and LIFED President Toby Coletti greet well-wishers during the proceedings. (Campanaro Files).



### The GOP Rebuilds

Following the disastrous election of 1964, the Nassau Republicans elected a new county chairman, Edward Speno. Speno was a protégé of Sprague, and was cut from the same moderate political cloth.<sup>98</sup> His first order of business was to try to draw labor back into the GOP camp. He announced that he hoped that union members “would think Republican because the GOP is interested in the problems of labor.”<sup>99</sup>

During the federation’s convention, Speno escorted Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Hempstead Republican Town Supervisor Ralph Caso to meet with Long Island labor leaders. He also arranged lunch meetings so that union leaders could share their concerns with elected Republican officials and candidates. It was at one of these luncheons that the ideological tug-of-war between the Goldwater conservatives and the Rockefeller supporters was put on full display. Congressional candidate Steve Derounian, a Goldwater Republican, shocked everyone when he declared that he was opposed to any efforts to repeal right-to-work provisions in the Taft-Hartley Act. Even worse, he publicly announced that he would not change his position because he would not “be pushed around” by labor.<sup>100</sup> Nassau County Republican leaders were thoroughly embarrassed by his comments, and they disavowed his statements. Governor Rockefeller, who was in attendance at the luncheon, made it clear that Derounian did not speak for the State Republican Party. Rockefeller reaffirmed his labor sympathies, saying that in New York, “the GOP believed in collective bargaining, and ‘is always against right-to-work laws.’”<sup>101</sup>

### The Rise of the Public Sector

Following their defeat in 1961, the Nassau Republican shored up their base of support. In 1962, when Nassau County Civil Service Employee Association president Irving Flamenbaum proposed to the

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<sup>98</sup> Ronald Maiorana, “Speno Enters Bid For Carlino Post: Announces Candidacy For Nassau,” *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1965. Dick Zander, “Town GOP to Caucus On Carlino Successor,” *Newsday*, Dec. 18, 1964. Speno took office in January, 1965.

<sup>99</sup> “2 Years of Progress.” Report to the Fifth Biennial Convention. Long island Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO. October 25–27. Lake Kiamesha, NY. Archie Cole. (ed.).

<sup>100</sup> “Speno Asks, Steve Replies, Labor Aghast,” *Newsday*, Sept. 29, 1966.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. “Speno Asks.” *Newsday*.

Board of Supervisors that members' dues be deducted from weekly paychecks, the Republican-dominated board unexpectedly voted to allow the deduction.<sup>102</sup> The dues check-off provided an immediate incentive for employees to join the CSEA. As members, they were able to purchase low-cost life insurance. The result was that the Nassau County chapter of CSEA expanded and soon became the largest in the state.<sup>103</sup>

For Irving Flamenbaum, his request was uncharacteristically aggressive, but it reflected the growing militancy of public sector workers. In neighboring New York City, District Council 37, a union of public sector workers led by Jerry Wurf had been formed. In 1958, Mayor Robert Wagner issued Executive Order 49 to allow city workers to join unions. The Order, however, did not include collective bargaining rights. Contract negotiations remained difficult, and frustrated workers continued to resort to direct action with demonstrations and walk-outs.<sup>104</sup>

On Long Island, one of the first group of public employees to follow their example was employees of Sanitation District 6, the largest sanitation district in the county. The workers had first attempted to organize in 1956 when they joined Local 813 of the Teamsters. They engaged in a "violence-marred, week-long stoppage but the sanitation board refused to recognize the union."<sup>105</sup>

Teamsters Local 813 lay dormant until 1965, when one hundred sixty-six workers in Sanitation District 6 turned instead and joined the National Maritime Union NMU. These workers were organized by a former tugboat captain turned union organizer, Harry Hennessey and received a charter establishing Local 342. Besides sanitation workers, Hennessey organized workers in the water districts as well as the Island's lifeguards, establishing a permanent presence for the NMU on Long Island.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Dick Zander, "County Set To Approve Civil Service Checkoff," *Newsday*, Jan. 5, 1962.

<sup>103</sup> By 1963, Nassau County CSEA had 8,000 members. "Civil Servants Opposes Foes of Strike Law," *Newsday*, Jan. 7, 1963.

<sup>104</sup> Retrieved from: [http://www.dc37.net/news/PEP/4\\_2009/DC37history\\_struggle.html](http://www.dc37.net/news/PEP/4_2009/DC37history_struggle.html); Joshua Freeman, *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933–1966* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 326; Freeman, *Working Class New York*, 203; Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 182.

<sup>105</sup> "Board Fails to Find New Sanitation Men," *Newsday*, June 5, 1965.

<sup>106</sup> A list of the special, districts, towns and villages that Local 342 represents is available at <http://local342.org/index.html>. Interview with William Hennessey by author, May 23, 2012. "Board Fails to Find New Sanitation Men," *Newsday*, June 5, 1965.

At the same time that the sanitation workers were organizing, Nassau County teachers began to demand collective bargaining rights. Inspired by teachers unions in New York City, the teachers of the Plainview-Old Bethpage School district received the right to choose a bargaining agent from the Board of Education. The teachers there had been affiliated with the Classroom Teachers Association, which was considered as a professional organization that rejected the idea of the need for union representation.<sup>107</sup> By allowing teachers to choose their own bargaining representative, the School Board opened the door for the American Federation of Teachers AFT to begin organizing.<sup>108</sup>

With only six other affiliates on Long Island, the AFT was the “underdog,” so it came as an unpleasant surprise to the leader of the Classroom Teachers Association when the AFT won the election. He blamed the New York City teachers for their undue influence for the loss.<sup>109</sup> The teachers’ union had a willing partner in their efforts. Justin Ostro, president of the Machinists Union at Republic Aviation, said that his union worked “hand in hand” with the AFT to elect school board members sympathetic to teachers’ rights.<sup>110</sup>

Like the Classroom Teachers Association, the Civil Service Employees Association also emphasized its role as an organization of professionals. CSEA was opposed to collective bargaining and went so far as to support the Condon-Wadlin Act designed to penalize public employees who went out on strike. They were even opposed to amendments to Condon-Wadlin that would reduce its harsh penalties or prevent its arbitrary enforcement.<sup>111</sup> At a CSEA luncheon on Long Island, the association’s counsel

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<sup>107</sup> Joe Gelmis, “Teachers Granted Secret Vote on Union,” *Newsday*, Sept. 19, 1962. There were no laws or precedents governing how a bargaining agent was to be chosen in education. Out of the 142 school districts, some would “thrash out salary and other differences” while “many districts do not permit their teachers groups to talk out problems with them at all.” Their plan was to use industrial relations policy to conduct an election. Buskin, Martin. “Role of Teachers Union At Stake on LI Today,” *Newsday*, Jan. 4, 1963.

<sup>108</sup> John Cummings, “Teacher Union Wins 1st Big LI Victory,” *Newsday*, Jan. 5, 1963. There were two major “bugaboos” facing the school board, the potential for a teachers strike and the demand for binding arbitration, neither of which were regulated by statute. Buskin, Martin. “Union Vote Draws Statewide Attention,” *Newsday*, Jan. 14, 1963; Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: the AFT and the NEA, 1900–1980* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 216. Twenty thousand NYC teachers struck the school system in April 1962.

<sup>109</sup> Martin Buskin, “AFCIO Union Wins Plainview Teacher Vote,” *Newsday*, Oct. 15, 1963.

<sup>110</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, April 25, 2015. Vincent Lyons, interview by author, April 12, 2013.

<sup>111</sup> “Assembly Relaxes Condon-Wadlin Act By Vote of 85 to 65,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1963. Stephen Estes, *Civil Service in New York State: History and Overview* (Ithaca, NY: Tompkins County Personnel Department, Aug. 11, 2008). Retrieved from <http://www.tompkins-co.org>. The amendment had a sunset clause. It expired in 1965. “600 Aides Ousted By Niagara Falls: City Manager Invokes State Law,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1952.

assured Long Island's state legislators that their members would not strike, and he emphasized that strikes were forbidden in the CSEA constitution.<sup>112</sup>

As president, Irving Flamenbaum maintained that repeal of Condon-Wadlin was unnecessary. His work on behalf of his members, he explained, was based on the relationships that he developed with the members of the Nassau County Board of Supervisors. Repeal of the anti-strike Condon-Wadlin Act, he said, would undermine his ability to "continuously engage in collective bargaining without having a strike hanging over an administrator's head."<sup>113</sup>

There was truth to Flamenbaum's arguments; since the mid-1950s, he was able to get wage increases and other benefits for employees. Over the years, Flamenbaum acquired an informal right to bargain for employees. Without any formal or legal standing, Flamenbaum was able to convince and cajole authorities into supporting his requests on behalf of public workers.<sup>114</sup> His approach wasn't unheard of at the time. Dick O'Hara, a member of IBEW and a labor lawyer, recalled that even in New York City during the 1950s and the 1960s, raises for public employees were often decided after the commissioner and the comptroller "would talk for a while and decide on a raise."<sup>115</sup>

In 1966, a gubernatorial election year, two of the key issues were the rights of public sector workers and the reform or repeal of the Condon-Wadlin Act. The candidates were the incumbent, Republican Nelson Rockefeller and his Democratic opponent, Frank O'Connor from New York City. Democrats were well-positioned. In Albany, they were leading the efforts as champions of the public sector. They had sponsored legislation providing collective bargaining for all public employees (except for the police) and orchestrated the elimination of the automatic provision for dismissal of striking workers.<sup>116</sup> O'Connor stood strongly against the Condon-Wadlin Act, and supported "genuine collective

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<sup>112</sup> "Civil Servants Opposes Foes," *Newsday*, Jan. 7, 1963.

<sup>113</sup> Kenneth Crowe, "Long Island Labor," *Newsday*, Nov. 20, 1964.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. "Long Island Labor," *Newsday*.

<sup>115</sup> Richard O'Hara, interview by author, March, 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Ronald Sullivan "Democratic Bill Eases Condon Act: Senate Measure Requires State and," *New York Times*, June 9, 1965.

bargaining for public sector workers.<sup>117</sup> In return, he received the endorsement of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers.<sup>118</sup>

In 1966, there had been an escalation of dissatisfaction and frustration by public sector workers. In neighboring New York City, transit workers went on strike, crippling the entire region.<sup>119</sup> In Nassau County, public employees were taking matters into their own hands. When negotiations between the newly-organized Bethpage-Plainview teachers and the school board broke down, the teachers threatened to go out on strike. The State Education Commissioner stepped in, warning the teachers that if they made good on their threat, they would be fired. The teachers defied his order, and two-thirds of the district's teachers walked off the job, marking the first time in Long Island history that public school teachers went on strike.<sup>120</sup> The walk-out lasted four days until the school district agreed to return to the bargaining table.<sup>121</sup> During the strike, the Education Commissioner threatened to punish the teachers under Condon-Wadlin. But cooler heads prevailed, and the strike was settled in the teachers' favor.<sup>122</sup>

It was obvious that the Condon-Wadlin Act was ineffective, and it was at this point that Governor Rockefeller stepped in. He appointed George Taylor, a professor at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania to lead a commission to recommend reforms. After working for just a few months, Taylor's commission submitted a plan that would provide collective bargaining rights and grant the right to elect a sole bargaining agent to public employees.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Terence Smith, "O Connor Draws Union Applause: Public Employees Cheer Talk on Condon-Wadlin Act," *New York Times*, Oct 1, 1966; "Dems Win UAW Backing, Lose Others," *Newsday*, Sept. 22, 1966.

<sup>118</sup> "Unions Widen Split on Choice for Gov.," *Newsday*, Oct. 1, 1966.

<sup>119</sup> Joshua Freeman, *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2001).

<sup>120</sup> Martin Buskin, "NY Bars Plainview School Strike: Allen Forbids Teacher Strike In Plainview," *Newsday*, March 5, 1966; Martin Buskin and Si Radiloff, "Teacher Strike Hits Plainview: 7 of 12 Schools Closed," *Newsday*, March 1, 1966; Roy Silver, "Teachers Strike Due on Long Island Today," *New York Times*, March 8, 1966.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. "Teacher Strike Hits Plainview: 7 of 12 Schools Closed."

<sup>122</sup> Martin Buskin, "Strikers in Plainview Censured," *Newsday*, March 30, 1966; "Allen Tells Boards to Consult Teachers," *Newsday*, April 12, 1966.

<sup>123</sup> Terence Smith, "25 Other Unresolved Contracts Add to City's Labor Headaches," *New York Times*, Jan. 12, 1966; John Sibley, "Assembly Defers Condon Law Bill: Repeal Measure Is Put Off Pending Panel Reports," *New York Times*, March 2, 1966; Sydney Schanberg, "G.O.P. Would Ease State Strike Curbs Urged by Governor: G.O.P. Would Ease State Strike Ban," *New York Times*, May 27, 1966; Stephen Estes, "Civil Service In New York State: History And Overview," Tompkins County Personnel Department, Ithaca NY August 11, 2008 Retrieved from <http://www.tompkins-co.org>. Sam Roberts, "Transit Strike: The Law; Meet Taylor, For Whom Fines Are Set," *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 2005. Retrieved from: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9806E0DE1430F932A15751C1A9639C8B63>.

On Long Island, the National Maritime Union continued to organize, unionizing workers at the Hempstead Sanitation Department. Irving Flamenbaum objected to the union, claiming that a majority of the sanitation workers were already members of CSEA.<sup>124</sup> To settle the dispute, Hempstead Town Supervisor Ralph Caso appointed a fact-finder; but neither the CSEA nor the NMU agreed to accept his findings.<sup>125</sup> To resolve the impasse, the town asked the State Labor Relations Board to step in. The Board scheduled the election to be held in 1967, and the result was CSEA's first major loss, marking the beginning of what would be a continuous battle among various unions to represent public sector workers over the next several years.<sup>126</sup>

The National Maritime Union also organized workers in the Town of North Hempstead's Incinerator Department. When they approached the North Hempstead Town Board for recognition and bargaining rights, the board suddenly voted instead to unilaterally recognize CSEA as the bargaining agent for *all* of the town's workers, including those already organized by the Maritime Union. Without state or federal laws governing public sector unions, there was nothing that the Maritime Union could do in response. The outcome, however, was that North Hempstead became the first town in Nassau County "to recognize a bargaining agent for its employees."<sup>127</sup>

### The 1966 Election

The Democrats resounding victory in Nassau County in 1964 was based on their promise of maintaining and creating Long Island job. Two years later, jobs remained an issue.<sup>128</sup> It was becoming clear that to the Long Island Federation of Labor that it was necessary to look at other means of job creation other than the defense industry. The Federation endorsed a number of projects. One was to build

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<sup>124</sup> Paul Leventhal, "Garbage Men Fired Unfairly, NY Aide Feels," *Newsday*, April 16, 1966.

<sup>125</sup> "Union Pushes Sanitation Poll," *Newsday*, July 16, 1966.

<sup>126</sup> "Hempstead Local Accepts Vote," *Newsday*, Nov. 26, 1966; "Jail 5 Bosses, Trashmen Ask," *Newsday*, July 19, 1967.

<sup>127</sup> "Hempstead's Sanitation Men To Vote on Bargaining Agent," *Newsday*, Dec. 9, 1966.

<sup>128</sup> "Campanaro Reports." *The Projector*. Vol. 1. No. 1. November, 1965, Campanaro files.; "Labor Group Bids to Hike LI Economy," *Newsday*, Dec. 21, 1964; Kenneth Crowe, "Labor Group Bids To Hike LI Economy," *Newsday*, Dec. 21, 1964.

a bridge across Long Island Sound to New England.<sup>129</sup> Another was to build an “atom-smasher” (a nuclear accelerator) at Brookhaven National Laboratory in neighboring Suffolk County.<sup>130</sup> Still another proposal called for an oceanographic center on the island.<sup>131</sup> The Federation also opened an office in Washington, D.C., becoming the first and only central labor council in the country to do so.<sup>132</sup> It was staffed by Anthony Mazzocchi, who was already working there for the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers. In Washington, he served as Long Island’s “pipeline” for information about defense contracts as well as other economic issues pertinent to Long Island.<sup>133</sup>

Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans offered plans to bolster the local economy. It was then that the LIFED began a serious discussion of forming a third party, a Labor Party. They had become politically powerful, and candidates eagerly sought their endorsement. Several of the leaders believed that by forming a Labor Party, they could increase pressure on elected officials to help create jobs. But after considerable debate, the executive board decided to wait until after the next election.<sup>134</sup>

The State Building Trades Council endorsed Governor Rockefeller. Peter Brennan, the head of the state council, said that he thought that the last time that the construction unions endorsed a Republican for governor was Tom Dewey.<sup>135</sup> The Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council, with its long history of supporting Republican candidates, enthusiastically backed the State Council’s decision. Council President William DeKoning, Jr. urged the LIFED to endorse the governor, saying he was “a wonderful personality who could charm the pants off you.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> One of the first suggestions was to connect Orient Point on the eastern tip of Suffolk County to Rhode Island. “How About A Bridge Over Long Island Sound?” *Newsday*, April 6, 1956. This idea was rejected by Robert Moses who wanted it built linking the North Shore of Nassau County in western Long Island to Westchester County. “Mr. Moses Wants a Bridge...But Who Else Does,” *Newsday*, Aug. 20, 1964. In 1966, the plan included building the bridge from Rocky Point in Suffolk County on the north shore of Long Island to Old Saybrook, CT. “Get On With The Bridge,” *Newsday*, March 10, 1966. By 1967, the span for the bridge settled on linking Oyster Bay to Rye, NY. In their convention report, the Fed announced that groundbreaking would begin in 1968. Ibid. “2 Years of Progress,” 11. The bridge was never built and the topic of bridge building faded by the 1970s.

<sup>130</sup> “LI Business, labor Set Campaign to Get A-Smash,” *Long Island Press*, May 5, 1966.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. “2 Years of Progress,” 49–51.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. “2 Years of Progress,” 38.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Myron Waldman, “LI labor Unit Tables New Party Proposal,” *Newsday*, May 25, 1966. The idea originated with the Suffolk County Committee on Political Education, sub-committee of LIFED’s COPE program. Years later, the failure to form a Labor Party would become the basis for internal squabbling.

<sup>135</sup> Damon Stetson, “Building Unions Back Rockefeller As Labor’s Friend: ‘Fair Treatment,’” *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1966. In 1954 and 1958, the State Building Trades Council endorsed W. Averell Harriman. In 1962, they remained neutral.

<sup>136</sup> “2 Years of Progress,” 19.

The State AFL-CIO, however, voted to remain neutral in the governor's race; and the Long Island Federation of Labor followed their lead. Even so, Rockefeller enjoyed tremendous support on Long Island. When Chairman Speno called an emergency meeting of the entire Republican county committee to attend a rally in support of Rockefeller, fifteen hundred of the party's faithful showed up. When Rockefeller appeared, they cheered wildly, pledging to deliver Nassau back to the GOP.<sup>137</sup> It was this kind of event that led the Rockefeller campaign to interpret LIFED's neutrality as a "silent endorsement."<sup>138</sup>

On a local level, the Federation endorsed two Democrats for congress, incumbents Lester Wolff and Herbert Tenzer.<sup>139</sup> Running against Wolff was Steve Derounian, "Goldwaterite Republican," a designation that had caused him to lose the seat in 1964.<sup>140</sup> Tenzer's Republican opponent, Thomas Brennan, was labeled "so far right that he makes Barry Goldwater look like a liberal."<sup>141</sup>

On Election Day, Republican committeemen made good on their promise and returned a whopping 142,000 plurality for Rockefeller over his opponent, proving that the county was once again the "bulwark of Republican strength in the state."<sup>142</sup> Rockefeller's coattails were long, and he helped carry all of the Republican candidates except those that were anti-labor in the county.<sup>143</sup> The right-wing Republicans who ran against the pro-labor Democrats were also defeated, putting to rest any attempt to move the party to the right.

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<sup>137</sup> Martin Arnold, "Governor Buoyed By Poll's Result: Calls L.I. Rally 'Greatest' Ever Held in State," *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1966.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. Stetson, "A.F.L.-C.I.O. To Stay Neutral." *New York Times*.

<sup>139</sup> "2 Years of Progress," 15.

<sup>140</sup> "Congress New York Suburbs" *New York Times*, Oct 21, 1964. Warren Weaver Jr., "G.O.P. To Present New Faces In Fall: Derounian Only Ex-Member In Serious House Race," *New York Times*, April 3, 1966.

<sup>141</sup> "2 Years of Progress." Report to the Fifth Biennial Convention. Long island Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO. October 25-27, 1967. Lake Kiamesha, NY. Archie Cole. (ed.):18.

<sup>142</sup> Roy Silver, "Governor's Edge 142,000 In Nassau: G.O.P.," *New York Times*, Nov. 10, 1966.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. Silver, "Governor's Edge."



### The Taylor Act

Rockefeller made good on his promise to reform state law governing public employees. The Taylor Law was quickly passed by the legislature and became effective in September 1967.<sup>144</sup> Problems with the law became apparent immediately. It was broadly written and full of loopholes. Public employees found that under the new law, they were unable to successfully negotiate an agreement. In Garden City, for example, firefighters were forced to file a lawsuit against village authorities after the village declared that they would never accept recommendations from a fact-finder. This situation, as well as several others, caused Long Island Federation Executive Director Rocco Campanaro to declare that, as written, the Taylor Act was a “disgrace to justice.”<sup>145</sup>

Despite its flaws, the passage of the Taylor Act encouraged public sector unionization. On Long Island, there were at least fifteen labor organizations ready to organize public sector workers.<sup>146</sup> In 1967, there were 39,000 public employees in Nassau County and the 24,000 in Suffolk County. CSEA claimed a membership of 18,500 in Nassau and in 8,500 in Suffolk County.<sup>147</sup> The first challenge to the other unions was to wrest power away from the entrenched CSEA.

One union was Teamsters Local 237. They had organized workers in Suffolk County’s Department of Building and Grounds, and the union began organizing workers at the Nassau County Sewage Treatment plant. Just as he had done in North Hempstead, Irving Flamenbaum claimed that ninety per cent of the 300 sewage plant workers already had representation since they belonged to the Nassau County Civil Service Employees Association. But the new law overrode his pronouncements, and the CSEA was forced to campaign for workers’ votes in a union election.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> CSEA Staff. *A Century of Service*. 76. The law went into effect in September, 1967. Sydney H. Schanberg, “G.O.P. Would Ease State Strike Curbs Urged by Governor: G.O.P. Would Ease State Strike Ban,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 1966. Stephen Estes, “Civil Service In New York State: History and Overview,” Tomkins County Personnel Department, Ithaca NY, August 11, 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.tompkins-co.org>. Sam Roberts, “Transit Strike: The Law; Meet Taylor, For Whom Fines Are Set,” *New York Times*, December 21, 2005. Retrieved from: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9806E0DE1430F932A15751C1A9639C8B63>.

<sup>145</sup> “The Long Island Federation of Labor: A Documentary of Dedication to a Better Long Island,” 6<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention November 4–7, 1969 Kiamesha Lake, NY.

<sup>146</sup> Representatives of AFSCME and the Teamsters Local 237 went before Nassau County’s Employment Relations Board and asked that the county not recognize any labor organization for the purpose of representation until the state could issue guidelines.

<sup>147</sup> Maureen O’Neill, “CSEA Facing Test of Strength,” *Newsday*, Aug. 13, 1970.

<sup>148</sup> Mike Unger, “Teamsters Bidding for LI Employees,” *Newsday*, June 22, 1967.

Following the passage of the Taylor Act, Governor Rockefeller unilaterally granted the CSEA the right to represent state employees. The other unions cried foul, declaring that recognition of a union without an election was unfair and illegal and that Rockefeller's actions were "undemocratic." One wrote a letter to the editor, published in *Newsday*, protesting that the selection of CSEA as the workers' bargaining representative was not only undemocratic, but it also denied local government workers the right to vote for their own representative.<sup>149</sup>

Irving Flamenbaum approved of the governor's decision and wanted the Nassau County Board of Supervisors to follow his example. CSEA had already received recognition rights for workers in the towns of Hempstead, North Hempstead, Oyster Bay, Glen Cove and Long Beach. The question of who would represent Nassau County workers, particularly in public works and sanitation, was important to the Republicans in power. In his study of patronage appointments in New York State, Judson Lehman James points out that the lowest level of jobs provided the most opportunities for patronage. In other words, "the less visible the job, the more likely it was a patronage appointment."<sup>150</sup> The largest group of patronage employees were in public works, and it was vital that the party retain control over the workers.

Flamenbaum claimed that because CSEA already represented seven thousand out of the eleven thousand county employees, it was unnecessary for an election for the county's eleven thousand employees to be held.<sup>151</sup> He said, "If Rockefeller can recognize us, why can't the County Executive?"<sup>152</sup> Flamenbaum proceeded to try to negotiate raises for county workers just as he had in the past, even though he had no legal standing as the workers' bargaining agent.

The Governor's blanket recognition of CSEA was overruled by the State Public Relations Board. Instead, state workers were divided into six bargaining units, putting an end to CSEA plans to represent all of the state workers in one bargaining unit.<sup>153</sup> Flamenbaum said it was "the most ghastly setup I ever

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<sup>149</sup> "State Employees and the Taylor Act," *Newsday*, Dec. 30, 1967; Zander, Dick. "The Evolution of a Militant Labor Leader," *Newsday*, Dec. 16, 1967.

<sup>150</sup> James, "The Loaves and the Fishes," 28.

<sup>151</sup> Nick's Plan on Unions Stalled by Caso, *Newsday*, May 18, 1967.

<sup>152</sup> "Employee Unit to Ask Board's Aid on Pay," *Newsday*, Nov. 24, 1967.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* CSEA: A Century of Service, 81. "NY Shifts Labor Bargaining Units," *Newsday*, Aug. 29, 1968. The teamsters also challenged Rockefeller's unilateral recognition of CSEA in the courts. *Matter of Council 50, AFL-CIO v. Rockefeller*, Nov. 24,

heard of,” while the leader of Local 381 of the Building Service Employees Union was jubilant, saying, “Now CSEA won’t have that impregnable position of being the only one recognized.”<sup>154</sup>

On Long Island, unions were wary of Flamenbaum’s relationship with county elected officials. Representatives with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees union and Teamsters Local 237 went before the county’s Employment Relations Board to ask that they not recognize any labor organization to represent county employees until the state could issue guidelines governing local union elections. The unions had carved out separate bargaining units among the county workers performing similar types of work.

Flamenbaum’s request for unilateral recognition of CSEA as representative for all county employees was still pending when Nickerson announced that the bargaining representative of county workers would be determined only upon certification by the Nassau County Public Employees Relations Board.<sup>155</sup> The Board of Supervisors agreed with Democratic County Executive Nickerson, causing Flamenbaum to uncharacteristically lash out, saying that he was “getting pretty damn impatient and disgusted with the Board of Supervisors.”<sup>156</sup> With negotiations going nowhere and other unions working feverishly to sign up county workers, Flamenbaum began to face internal challenges from his own members.

Between September 1967 and June 1968, seventeen representation elections were held on Long Island; out of those elections, CSEA won only seven.<sup>157</sup> Labor relations were still confusing to elected officials. The Nurses Association had won an election and asked County Executive Nickerson for recognition as the workers’ exclusive representative. In negotiations, both the CSEA and the State Nurses Association claimed the right to represent the nurses. Refusing to take sides in the dispute between CSEA and the Nurses Association, Nickerson passed off the problem to the county labor commissioner, Robert

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1967, State Supreme Court, Special Term. 55 Misc.2d 250. 284 N.Y.S.2d 803. Retrieved from: <https://www.casemine.com/judgement/us/59148520add7b049344c1a5d#>

<sup>154</sup> “NY Shifts Labor Bargaining Units,” *Newsday*, Aug. 29, 1968. *CSEA: A Century of Service*, 78.

<sup>155</sup> “Labor Unit Asked to Await NY Guide,” *Newsday*, Sept. 9, 1967.

<sup>156</sup> “Employee (sic) Unit to Ask Board's Aid on Pay,” *Newsday*, Nov. 24, 1967.

<sup>157</sup> Maureen O’Neill, “CSEA Facing Test of Strength,” *Newsday*, Aug. 13, 1970.

MacGregor. MacGregor solved the problem by permitting Irving Flamenbaum to sit in on the meetings as the Nurses Association negotiated a contract. Flamenbaum explained his presence by saying that “the civil service association represents all county workers” and “for years has acted as the nurses’ spokesman in an informal capacity.”<sup>158</sup>

But the militancy of public sector across the region had emboldened Nassau County workers. When the president of a snow removal sanitation unit in Oyster Bay was denied a seat on the CSEA negotiating team, he led his members out on a wildcat strike, demanding that CSEA start behaving like a real union. He said, “Everybody knows that the CSEA is just a bunch of puppets for the town. They’re all in this together. Most of these jobs are patronage jobs. But we’re not going to be puppets.”<sup>159</sup>

The growing militancy of the CSEA membership forced Flamenbaum to change tactics. Saddled with a reputation as having “no bite and no backbone,” he became a “firm believer” in public demonstrations by workers. He even went so far as to threaten the Board of Supervisors that if his demands were not met, CSEA members would “demonstrate on the street.”<sup>160</sup>

### Ebb Tide

The Long Island Federation of Labor endorsed Democrats Eugene Nickerson for Nassau County Executive and the incumbent Oyster Bay Town Supervisor Michael Petito for re-election in 1967. The Federation endorsed only one local Republican, Ralph Caso, for presiding officer of the Town of Hempstead.<sup>161</sup> For the time being, LIFED was still supporting local Democrats. But there were signs that labor’s relationship with at least one faction of the Democratic Party was fraying.

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<sup>158</sup> “County Nurses OK Pay Offer,” *Newsday*, Feb. 3, 1967.

<sup>159</sup> David Andelman and Bob Bridge, “Wildcat Strike Cuts O. Bay Sanit Crew,” *Newsday*, March 1, 1968; “Oyster Bay Sanitationmen Quit In Dispute Over Representation,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1968. The leader of the wildcat strike was Danny Donovan who would later go on to become state president of CSEA.

<sup>160</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 14, 2014; Dick Zander, “The Evolution of a ‘Militant’ Labor Leader,” *Newsday*, Dec. 16, 1967.

<sup>161</sup> Until 1996, the Town of Hempstead had two supervisors, a supervisor and a presiding supervisor. Both of the supervisors sat on the county Board of Supervisors. This gave the Town of Hempstead additional voting power on the county board. *Goosby v. Town Bd. of the Town of Hempstead*, NY, 956 F. Supp. 326 (E.D.N.Y. 1997), U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York - 956 F. Supp. 326 (E.D.N.Y. 1997), February 20, 1997. Retrieved from: <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/956/326/1895214/>.

In his study of Nassau County politics, Dennis Ippolito found that in 1967, ideological appeal was important to the Democrats.<sup>162</sup> Issues like the Vietnam War was dividing Democrats. The Long Island Federation of Labor was clear about their position on the war. When a contingency of Long Islanders was invited to meet with Secretary of State Dean Rusk to discuss United States policy, Toby Coletti pledged the Federation's support for the Vietnam War.<sup>163</sup>

Conditions in the county had changed since the last local election. The economy continued to weaken. Employment was sinking, county expenditures were rising, and the tax burden on suburban homeowners was rising. Social issues took center stage during the campaign. Spending in the County Welfare Department became a particularly contentious issue among voters. In just four years, from 1963 to 1967, spending in the department went from \$15 million to \$40 million.<sup>164</sup> Nickerson's opponent, Sol Wachtler, attacked Nickerson for rising costs and accused him of trying to spread slums in the county. Nickerson countered Wachtler by charging him with "injecting prejudice" into the campaign.<sup>165</sup>

Across the country, the issue of bussing school children to achieve racial parity in the schools was shifting the political paradigm as well. When the State Education Commissioner ordered elementary school children in the Malverne School District in Nassau County to be bussed, their parents responded with fury.<sup>166</sup> County Executive Nickerson said that he supported limited bussing, leading Democratic Chairman Jack English to take the opposite position. English reassured jittery voters that the Democratic Party was opposed to bussing and wholeheartedly supported neighborhoods schools. The Republicans immediately seized on the contradiction and used it as a way to attack Democrats, saying that they "favor compulsory school bussing, no matter what Jack English may say."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Ippolito

<sup>163</sup> Thomas Collins, "LI Contingent Confers With Rusk on Viet War," *Newsday*, June 18, 1966.

<sup>164</sup> Shelland, "The County Executive," 115. Between 1947 and 1962, the tax rate in Nassau County went up seven hundred and eighty-four percent. Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 103.

<sup>165</sup> Paul Leventhal, "Nick, Wachtler Clash on Welfare," *Newsday*, Nov. 2, 1967.

<sup>166</sup> Robert B Semple Jr., "In The Tight Races, The Backlash Vote May Mean Victory," *New York Times*, Oct. 17, 1966.

<sup>167</sup> Silver, Roy R. "Busing Issue Stirs Dispute In Nassau," *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1966.

By endorsing limited bussing, Nickerson won the support of the left faction of the party, but he lost the moderates. Adding to Nickerson's weakness was the voters' belief that he was no longer interested in county government. He had made several attempts to run for higher office.<sup>168</sup> Republicans were convinced that Nickerson would not run for county executive again, and they began to plan for the next election.

Despite these reservations, Nickerson was re-elected to his third term, but there were clear signs that the political winds were shifting. In his first race for County executive, in 1961, Nickerson had won with a margin of 7,001 votes.<sup>169</sup> In 1964, President Johnson's assurances that defense jobs on Long Island would be saved produced a tidal wave of support for Democrats, giving Nickerson a win of 90,000 votes over his Republican opponent.<sup>170</sup> But in 1967, hope was quickly waning as defense manufacturers closed their doors. Nickerson won re-election by only 845 votes.<sup>171</sup> While Nickerson continued to have the support of organized labor, the large and powerful locals of the defense industry unions that were so vital to the Democratic Party were gone. Outside of the building trades, what was left in the private sector were small locals, such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers with 3,000 members, the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union with 4,000 members, and the 4,500 members of the Retail Clerks Union.<sup>172</sup>

Also missing was strong leadership from the president of the Long Island Federation of Labor. Toby Coletti was re-elected to another two-year term as president in 1967, but shortly after his re-election he became inactive in Federation affairs. He had left his job with the Meatcutters Union and went to work for the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Local 1770. He worked for AFSCME for only a short time before he took a job representing members of Teamsters Local 813 in New York City. Working in the city, Coletti neglected his role as Federation president, and his

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<sup>168</sup>Robert Mayor, "Robert Mayer In New York: The Luck of Eugene Nickerson," *Newsday*, April 3, 1968; Jack Altshul, "No Such Thing as an Ex-Politician," *Newsday*, Jan. 11, 1972. Nickerson ran twice for governor and once for the US Senate.

<sup>169</sup> Dick Zander, "County Dems See Bright Spots All Over," *Newsday*, Nov. 9, 1961.

<sup>170</sup> Dick Zander, "Nickerson Reelected By 90,000 Margin," *Newsday*, Nov. 4, 1964.

<sup>171</sup> Roy Silver, "Nickerson Is Victor By Slight Margin; Recount Is Sought: Nickerson...," *New York Times*, Nov. 8, 1967.

<sup>172</sup> Jon Margolis, "Labor on LI: Who's Who," *Newsday* Jan. 28, 1969.

absence took a toll on the organization. Newspaper accounts stated that Coletti's power was "fading," and in the aftermath of the county elections, the Federation itself seemed "disorganized."<sup>173</sup>

Republican County Chairman Edward Speno decided that he had had enough and sailed on to other pursuits. As his replacement to lead the county GOP, he turned to the Town Leader of the Hempstead Republican Party, his protégé, State Assemblyman Joseph Margiotta.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid. "Labor on LI: Who's Who."

<sup>174</sup> Dick Zander, "Chiefs OK Margiotta in Nassau," *Newsday*, Dec. 28, 1967. "Speno to Quit as Nassau GOP Leader: Speno Will Quit Nassau GOP Post," *Newsday*, Dec. 21, 1967.



Governor Nelson Rockefeller on Long Island (1967). From left to right: President of the Long Island Federation of Labor Toby Coletti; unidentified woman; LIFED Secretary, Mimis Therry; LIFED Executive Director Rocco Campanaro; Town of Hempstead Supervisor, Ralph Caso; New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller; Nassau County Republican Chairman, Edward Speno; and Irwin Fleischer, secretary of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Nassau and Suffolk Counties.





Empire State Labor-Management Exhibit, May 12, 1967. Left to right: Mimis Therry, LIFED secretary; Irwin Fleischer, secretary of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Nassau and Suffolk Counties and LIFED vice-president; LIFED president Toby Coletti, Governor Nelson Rockefeller; LIFED Executive Secretary Rocco Campanaro; William DeKoning, Jr., President of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Nassau and Suffolk Counties. (Campanaro Files).



From left to right: Toby Coletti, President of the Long Island Federation of Labor; Governor Nelson Rockefeller, Long Island Federation of Labor Executive Director; Rocco Campanaro, State Senator and Nassau County Republican Chairman Edward Speno. May 12, 1967. (Campanaro Files).



From left to right: Supervisor of the Town of Hempstead Ralph Caso; Toby Coletti, President of the Long Island Federation of Labor; Governor Nelson Rockefeller; Long Island Federation of Labor Executive Director Rocco Campanaro, State Senator and Nassau County Republican Chairman Edward Speno. May 12, 1967. (Campanaro Files).



Photo taken at the LIFED 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention, October 22–25, 1967. Left to right: Executive Director Rocco Campanaro; LIFED President Toby Coletti; Ralph Caso, Supervisor of the Town of Hempstead. (Campanaro Files).



LIFED Executive Director Rocco Campanaro and U.S. Senator Robert Kennedy circa 1964–1965. They became great friends. (Campanaro Files).





The first Democrat to be elected as Nassau County Executive, Eugene Nickerson, speaking at a labor gathering. From left to right: LIFED Executive Director Rocco Campanaro, Jack Maltz, LIFED vice and President of Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union Local No. 287 and Eugene Nickerson. The photo was taken circa 1968. (Campanaro Files).

## *Chapter Seven*

### *Back to the Future: 1968 and Beyond*

In 1968, the Nassau County Democrats remained optimistic. They had won the office of county executive, albeit narrowly, the previous fall. But with the presidential election came a great deal of debate and internal wrangling in the party over national issues. Lines were drawn among different factions within the Nassau Democratic Party, and when County Executive Nickerson decided to run for higher office, the party failed to unite in support of their candidate.

The Republicans had elected a new leader, Joe Margiotta, who began to rebuild the party. He looked to the Long Island Federation of Labor where there was new leadership. The defense industry had left the island, taking with them the unions and their leaders who had been so close to the Nassau Democrats. Coinciding with these changes was the rise of the public sector unions, and it was still unclear how partisan they would be.

By 1970, the Republican Party was prepared to run a strong candidate for Nassau County Executive. The Democrats, fractured and demoralized, had neglected to build a political machine. With only the teachers unions and a small number of other unions for support, they were unable to withstand the Republican onslaught. The Republicans elected Ralph Caso as County Executive, a friend of labor. In the 1970s and early 1980s Margiotta linked the party with the public sector unions and the building trades and established a powerful political machine. Despite Margiotta's fall from leadership in 1984, Nassau County Republicans had re-created an alliance based on transactional exchange that would endure into the twenty-first century.

#### Climbing the Political Ladder

During the 1968 elections, a new group had emerged in support of the candidacy of Eugene McCarthy, the anti-Vietnam War peace candidate. The emergence of the New Democratic Coalition NDC, an anti-war liberal faction within the Democratic Party, revealed the growing divide within the

party. One their most vocal supporters was County Executive Eugene Nickerson. Nickerson had announced that he would try to unseat New York's liberal Republican Senator Jacob Javits, and decided that he needed the support of the NDC faction to win the Democratic nomination.<sup>1</sup> Among the Nassau County Democratic leaders who were considered mainstream was Michael Petito, the Oyster Bay Town Supervisor. Among party regulars, he was considered a "shining star." Petito was the head of President Lyndon Johnson's campaign efforts, and he viewed Nickerson as too far to the left.<sup>2</sup>

Organized labor had its own doubts about Nickerson's support of McCarthy. Justin Ostro remembered that while Nickerson claimed to be liberal, in fact, he gave unions only lukewarm support. Ostro recalls that as County Executive, he thought that Nickerson would have been more comfortable as a Republican.<sup>3</sup> Lurana Campanaro agreed with Ostro's assessment and recalls that Nickerson was generally out of touch with working people and the labor movement.<sup>4</sup>

After President Lyndon Johnson's decided not to run for re-election, many of Nassau County's labor leaders lined up in support of New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy. First elected as senator from New York in 1964, Robert Kennedy had developed a strong relationship with organized labor in Nassau County. Rocco Campanaro eagerly joined in support of Kennedy's campaign. The men grew close, and during the late spring of 1968, Campanaro and Kennedy scheduled a meeting to discuss Campanaro's future in a possible Kennedy administration.<sup>5</sup> Kennedy also formed a friendship with Dick O'Hara, a labor relations attorney associated with Local 3 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). He, too, discussed the future with Kennedy.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Altshul, "No Such Thing as an Ex-Politician," *Newsday*, Jan. 11, 1972; Ray Larsen and Keith Engh, "SUFFOLK DEMS REJECT NICK: Delegates Vote to Back O'Connor," *Newsday*, Aug. 13, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, August 26, 2014; "Suffolk Dems Plan Poll on Viet War," *Newsday*, Jan. 16, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> Justin Ostro, interview by author, March 29, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Lurana Campanaro recalled that when Nickerson visited her husband at their home, he expressed surprise that someone in the labor movement could live in a nice home. She also remembers that Nickerson would affect a Boston accent at certain times. Campanaro interview with author Aug. 26, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Richard O'Hara, Interview with author, Feb. 23, 2015.

A few months later, all of their plans were drastically changed. In June of 1968, Robert Kennedy was felled by an assassin's bullet while campaigning in California.<sup>7</sup> Kennedy's supporters at the Long Island Federation of Labor were devastated by the news. With Kennedy gone, the Long Island Federation of Labor searched for an alternative candidate to support. The Republican presidential candidates, Richard Nixon and his running mate, Spiro Agnew, weren't even considered. The Federation's leadership viewed Nixon as "representative of the special interests," meaning that Nixon and Agnew were the candidates of big business.<sup>8</sup> In fact, at Robert Kennedy's funeral, while Rocco Campanaro spoke with vice president Humphrey, he pointedly avoided Richard Nixon.<sup>9</sup>

For president of the United States, the Federation decided that they could not support Republican Richard Nixon and his running mate Spiro Agnew. They were men of "special interests," meaning the interests of the anti-labor right. Instead, the federation's leaders decided to follow the lead of the national AFL-CIO, and endorsed Vice-president Hubert Humphrey for the Democratic presidential nomination.<sup>10</sup>

The Nassau County Republican Party dutifully stood behind Nixon, and even organized a rally in support of his candidacy. The GOP had historically been able to attract huge crowds, but when Nixon arrived, there was little enthusiasm, and newspaper accounts described Nixon's crowds as only "fair." The new chairman of the party, Joe Margiotta, made excuses for the sparse attendance by claiming that most people were either at home watching the World Series or attending one of the twenty five high school football games that were being played at the same time as Nixon's visit.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Evan Thomas, *Robert Kennedy: His Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 391.

<sup>8</sup> The Long Island Federation of Labor, 6<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention, "A Documentary of Dedication to a Better Long Island," November 4–7, 1967–69, Kiamesha Lake, NY.

<sup>9</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 12, 2014; Roy Reed, "Humphrey Hints He'll Enter Race: Tells Unionists in Pittsburgh He ...," *New York Times*, April 5, 1968.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. The Long Island Federation of Labor, 6<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention; "Humphrey Hints He'll Enter Race," *Newsday*, April 5, 1968; Roy Reed, "Humphrey Hints He'll Enter Race: Tells Unionists in Pittsburgh He ...," *New York Times*, April 5, 1968.

<sup>11</sup> Glen Padnick, Earl Lane, and Dick Zander, "Nixon LI Trip Aided GOPers, Leaders Say: Nixon Helped: LI GOP Leaders," *Newsday*, Oct. 7, 1968. Joe Margiotta made excuses for the sparse attendance. He claimed that most people preferred watching the World Series or one of the twenty five high school football games that were being played at the same time as Nixon's visit. His excuses were unusual because the GOP had historically attracted huge crowds to their political rallies. Humphrey's visit to the Island, on the other hand, drew thousands. Approximately fifteen thousand turned out for the rally. Though the party and the newspapers were disappointed with the turnout, Nixon was extremely impressed.



Shortly after Nixon's rally in Nassau County, the Long Island Federation of Labor organized a similar event for Democratic nominee Hubert H. Humphrey. Joined by the leaders of the Long Island Federation of Labor, Humphrey's visit drew thousands. The turnout at the rally put to rest any doubts about labor's power to influence voters. The size of the crowds surprised even the Democrats, leading to speculation that Humphrey could pull an upset in Nassau County, or at the very least, keep down Republican margins.<sup>12</sup>

On Election Day, the tepid support for Nixon was revealed; the Republican ticket barely eked out a victory in the county. Political pundits and Nixon supporters blamed Nassau County's failure to turn out high numbers for Nixon as the major reason for his loss of New York's electoral votes.<sup>13</sup> What was apparent to the leadership of the local Republican Party, however, was the necessity of winning the support of organized labor to handily win in Nassau County.

### Margiotta's Ascent

As county chairman, Margiotta had a distinct advantage. Not only was he the county Republican Party chairman, he was a member of the State Assembly representing Uniondale in Albany. There, he controlled the Republican delegation and could deliver legislation that would benefit the Nassau Republicans. Following the 1968 election, he used his elected office to rebuild the base of the Nassau Republicans.

Margiotta had a personal leaning towards conservatism, and had developed a reputation as a practical politician. Lurana Campanaro, who was active in county politics at the time when Margiotta first became chairman, remembers him as "old school," who was direct and humorless. Comparing Margiotta to Sprague, Campanaro said that Sprague was always a "gentleman," while Margiotta was a politician who would "cut you off at your knees." Margiotta's views towards organized labor did not include a progressive approach to women in politics. A committeeman who worked with Margiotta during the

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<sup>12</sup> "Humphrey Alters Route for LI Visit Saturday," *Newsday*, Nov. 1, 1968; "HHH Buoys Dems on LI," *Newsday*, Nov. 4, 1968.

<sup>13</sup> Dick Zander, "Nixon Sweeps HHH in Suffolk; Slim Nassau Lead Hurts in NY," *Newsday*, Nov. 6, 1968.

1980's recalls that the chairman was uncomfortable with the idea of women in politics and would probably have never survived today's changing role of women in politics.<sup>14</sup>

Margiotta's response to a plan for rental housing provided an opportunity for him to show his conservative side. To the suburban homeowner, apartments meant cheap housing, and rental units meant that tenants couldn't be screened. Plainly speaking, to the majority of suburban white homeowners, it meant the prospect of minorities moving into their neighborhoods. Long Island neighborhoods were strictly segregated, and while red lining and steering were illegal, the practices continued well after they were outlawed by the courts.<sup>15</sup>

Margiotta used his position to exploit suburban fears. When the State Of New York proposed to build high-rise apartment buildings in Uniondale, suburbanites quickly responded to the perceived threat, and formed Citizens and Taxpayer's Associations to fight the proposal. They argued against the high rises, saying that the new developments would create a "welfare ghetto," a transparent reference to their fear of minorities in their neighborhoods.<sup>16</sup> They focused their blame on neighboring New York City, claiming that "it was a pestilence waiting to spread," and they refused "to let anyone bring the dirty city into their paradise of small homes."<sup>17</sup> He led the charge to beat back the proposed housing in the state capitol in Albany. He organized the entire Nassau County Republican state delegation behind him and confronted the governor, threatening to block all of Rockefeller's proposals if the housing plan was passed. According to newspaper reports, a furious Rockefeller called Margiotta and promised to come to Nassau County to campaign against him. Margiotta remained defiant. He controlled the votes of the Nassau County delegation to the assembly and he responded to the governor, saying, "Be my guest." The tactic worked. The governor backed down, and assured Margiotta that state funds would never be used to

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<sup>14</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Sept. 9, 2014. A current County Republican Party official who wishes to remain anonymous agreed with Lurana Campanaro's recollections. He said that Joe Margiotta would probably have had difficulty in accepting what he called the "feminization of politics." Margiotta didn't think women belonged in politics.

<sup>15</sup> Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*. 175. "The REAL Suburbia: Bias Disguised But Not Dispelled," *Newsday*, May 10, 1973.

<sup>16</sup> Shelland, "The County Executive," 120.

<sup>17</sup> Harvey Aronson, "Pedantry, Politics; Most of All Panic," *Newsday*, May 27, 1969.

build dense, high-rise housing in Nassau County.<sup>18</sup> By protecting local zoning and home rule, Margiotta became a hero to Nassau County homeowners.

He also cemented the long-established ties between the Nassau Republicans and CSEA. The Teamsters, the Communication Workers of America CWA, and CSEA were locked in a battle to represent Nassau County workers. Because the Taylor Law was new, the steps needed to establish a bargaining unit remained unclear. When the law was first enacted in 1967, Governor Rockefeller had unilaterally recognized CSEA as the bargaining unit for all state employees. But after challenges from other unions, the courts overturned the governor's decision and determined that elections should be held to determine the bargaining units for state workers.<sup>19</sup>

In Nassau County, the Teamsters and the Communication Workers of America (CWA) submitted petitions to the County Employment Relations Board for calling for elections to establish separate bargaining units within the county workforce.<sup>20</sup> At the hearing to determine which of the unions were qualified to be on the ballot, the Board eliminated both the Teamsters and the CWA request. Instead, they determined that all the county workers should all be in one bargaining unit. Only the CSEA submitted such a proposal, and as the one union to qualify, only CSEA appeared on the ballot. The results of the election, of course, were inevitable, and less than fifty per cent of the county employees voted.<sup>21</sup>

That the board had decided in favor of CSEA was suspect, but Flamenbaum was jubilant. Since the 1950s, he had attended the Board of Supervisor meetings as the informal representative of the county employees, and had always been deferential to the Board of Supervisors, so much so that some county

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<sup>18</sup> Allan Eysen, "Why Joe Margiotta Is A Winner," *Newsday*, March 12, 1978.

<sup>19</sup> In the Matter of New York State Employees Council 50, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO, by William F. Russ, Its President petitioner, v. Nelson A. Rockefeller, as Governor. 24 Nov. 1967, Supreme Court, Special term, Albany County. 55 Misc.2d 250, 284 N.Y.S. 2d 803.

<sup>20</sup> Following the passage of the Taylor Act in 1967, Governor Rockefeller recognized CSEA as the representative for all 100,000 state workers. His decision was overruled by the Public Employment Relations Board. "Top NY Court Approves State Employee Grouping," *Newsday*, July 2, 1969.

<sup>21</sup> Glenn Padnick, "CSEA Wins by Hefty Vote in Nassau," *Newsday*, Sept. 28, 1968.

employees accused him of being obsequious and having “no backbone.”<sup>22</sup> The results of the election assured the Republicans that the union leader in place was someone they could work with.<sup>23</sup>

### Rebuilding the Engine

When Joe Margiotta became chairman of the Nassau Republican Party, he immediately set out to reinforce the one per cent rule requiring contributions from local government employees. During the years of Democratic rule over the county, the Republicans maintained political control of the Town of Hempstead, the largest in the county. Margiotta said, “This is the deal. If you don’t give your one percent you don’t get a raise.”<sup>24</sup> Any worker who refused to live up to their obligations was demoted or fired. As described in Chapter Four, Jerry Laricchiuta, who became president of Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) Local 830, recalled that as recently as the 1980s, one per cent was deducted from an employee’s paychecks as their contribution to the GOP.<sup>25</sup>

Party insiders viewed Margiotta’s demands as necessary to impose discipline and revive the political machine. One highly placed Republican Party member remembers Margiotta as someone “like your grandfather” who was “more like a teacher” who “demanded hard work and loved the political process.”<sup>26</sup> According to Margiotta, the one per cent demanded by the party was necessary to ensure access to the political process by the “little man,” and provided them with a direct stake in the party. After all, he explained, if common workers didn’t exchange contributions for jobs, only “rich men” could afford to be involved in politics.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, August 26, 2014. County workers were growing impatient with his approach. The president of a sanitation crew in Oyster Bay, Daniel Donovan, was frustrated with the pace of negotiations and led his men out on a wildcat strike. He called Flamenbaum a “puppet” and said he would not “buckle” under Flamenbaum. David Andelman and Bob Bridgeo, “Wildcat Strike Cuts O. Bay Sanit Crew,” *Newsday*, March 1, 1968.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. “CSEA Wins by Hefty Vote”. When the results were announced, Flamenbaum declared that he would ask for a twenty percent wage increase for all county workers. The year before, in 1967, the state CSEA had demanded a twenty percent increase for state workers. “CSEA to Seek 20 Percent Wage Increases,” *Civil Service Leader*. Vol.XXVIII, No. 50, Aug. 15, 1962. It was hardly likely that he would succeed given that the Board of Supervisors had already included a three percent raise for the 1968 county budget. Dick Zander, “The Evolution of a ‘Militant’ Labor Leader,” *Newsday*, Dec. 16, 1967.

<sup>24</sup> Bob Wyrick, “Price for a Public Job in Nassau County,” *Newsday*, April 16, 1972.

<sup>25</sup> Jerry Laricchiutta, interview by author, March 22, 2012. In 2012, Laricchiutta resigned as a GOP committeeman in protest of cuts in the county budget.

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous County Republican Party official, interview by author, Feb. 4, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Bob Wyrick, “Price for Public Job in Nassau: One Percent for the Party: One Dollar,” *Newsday*, April 16, 1972.

Margiotta also increased the power of the Republican Party by committee by increasing the number of members on the county committee. He expanded the number of election districts from 903 to 971, with two committee members per district. Each election district was responsible for raising four hundred dollars each year. In return, many of the committeemen received jobs, and with Margiotta in control of patronage, the party quickly turned into a “giant employment agency.” By 1973, it was estimated that at least seventy-five per cent of the GOP executive committee were on the public payroll.<sup>28</sup>

Just as his predecessor Sprague had done, Margiotta closely monitored the distribution of patronage jobs. To get hired as a lifeguard at a community pool or in a local park, the applicant had to be a member of the Republican Party. Getting a job in exchange for party loyalty was once again ingrained in the political culture that the practice continued into the twenty first century.<sup>29</sup>

Summer jobs were especially important to the patronage machine because the young people who wanted jobs had to register as Republicans, providing a constant flow of new members to the party. Many who registered as Republicans remained in the party as adults. In addition, part-time summer workers who went on to getting full-time jobs with the towns or county often became necessary to become a committeeman. Even when patronage employees were granted civil service status, many remained as district committeemen. This was true of many who became active in their unions. For example, Jerry Laricchiuta, the President of CSEA Local 830, Nassau County’s largest union, is a Republican committeeman. Former PBA president James Carver remembers that when his family arrived on Long Island during the 1950s they registered with the GOP because “everyone joined the Republican Party when they moved here.” His father was hired as a county police officer in 1956. This was a pattern that

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<sup>28</sup> Harrison, *Machine Politics*, 150; Brian Donovan and Bruce Lambert, “Nepotism and Government Jobs—Nassau’s GOP Isn’t Bashful,” *Newsday*, Oct. 29, 1972; Frank Lynn, “Nassau Republicans March to Beat Of Powerful Drumming by Margiotta,” *New York Times*, Dec. 8, 1972; Alan Eysen, “Money, Men and Patronage Oil Nassau County’s GOP Machine,” *Newsday*, March 11, 1973.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Hendershot, interview by author, September, 2013; Vincent Lyons, interview by author, Feb. 11, 2013; Michele Lynch, interview by author, March 2012; Ron Smith, interview by author, April 4, 2012. The number of summer jobs under the Republican administration were double that of the Democratic administration. Alan Eysen and Pete Bowles, “Politics as Usual in Summer Jobs,” *Newsday*, July 25, 1977.

continued into the next century. In 2012, Carver said that most Nassau County police officers are registered with the Republican Party.<sup>30</sup>

Under Margiotta's rules, civil service regulations that required that new hires be tested were ignored. Instead, favored friends and relatives were hired as temporary employees. And if a friend or relative failed a civil service exam, a new job title was created, after which they were hired for the position as temporary employees, often at a higher salary. Newspaper accounts from the 1970s revealed how the county workforce overflowed with those hired through their political connections. One county worker defended the system, saying she saw "nothing wrong with several members of a political family holding public jobs." After all, she said, "I happen to come from a brilliant family. It would be a disservice to the people of Nassau County to deprive them of one of us just because we are related."<sup>31</sup>

Vincent Lyons, retired Regional Staff Director for the New York State United Teachers in Suffolk County, remembers that during the 1960s, when he went to apply for a job at public works without a letter of recommendation from his local Republican committeeman, he was laughed at and turned away.<sup>32</sup>

Former President of Communication Workers of America Local 1104 George Bloom learned this same lesson the hard way. Right after World War Two, Bloom's parents moved to Merrick, a hamlet in the Town of Hempstead in Nassau County. His parents registered to vote as Democrats. Despite their registration (or maybe because of it—Bloom was never sure), the local Republican councilman often dropped in on the family and would engage in friendly political discussions. This camaraderie occurred over a period of many years, but despite the councilman's best efforts, Bloom's mother remained a registered Democrat and worked for the party as an Election Day poll checker at the Board of Elections. When Bloom was 21, he applied for a job as a corrections officer at a new facility that was being built in Nassau County. He learned from his neighborhood councilman that he probably should have registered as

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<sup>30</sup> James Carver, interview with author, April 19, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Donovan and Bruce Lambert Jr., "Nepotism and Government Jobs—Nassau's GOP Isn't Bashful," *Newsday*, Oct. 29, 1972.

<sup>32</sup> Vincent Lyons, interview by author, Feb. 11, 2013.

a member of the Republican Party when he turned eighteen. To increase his chances of being hired, he switched party registration and became a Republican. But apparently, it was too late. His initial failure to register with the party at eighteen left him without political support. Of the three thousand people who applied, he was one of the top seven candidates. But he wasn't hired. He realized that without the support of his local Republican committeeman as an advocate, he couldn't get a job controlled by local government.<sup>33</sup>

It wasn't just the public sector where political connections counted. Union leaders in the private sector also served as Republican committeemen. Anthony Macagnone, who is currently a member of the Oyster Bay Town Council and the L.I. Director for the Northeast Regional Council of Carpenters and an officer in Carpenters Local 290, is a Republican committeeman.<sup>34</sup> John Durso, president of Local 338 RWDSU, UFCW, was a Nassau Republican Committeeman before he switched his party affiliation to Democrat.<sup>35</sup>

Michele Lynch's family moved to Long Island from Queens during the post-war years. Her father was an operating engineer, and both her parents were Democrats. But unlike George Bloom's parents, Michele's mother encouraged her to register as a Republican when she turned eighteen. Her mother told her that who she voted for was her business, but counseled her that the Republicans' grip on local government on Long Island was so tight that if she wanted a job, a license, or a permit of any sort, it would "go much easier" if she were registered as a Republican.<sup>36</sup>

These men and women later grew up to become union leaders and local elected officials. Their recollections illustrate the effectiveness of the Republican Party in providing jobs and favors in exchange for votes. By encouraging their children to register with the Republican Party, parents recognized the power the GOP had to affect not just their daily lives but also their children's' futures.

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<sup>33</sup> George Bloom, interview by author, Aug. 27, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Macagnone, interview by author, April 12, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> John Durso, interview by author, March 29, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Michele Lynch, interview by author March 12, 2012. Years later, as 1199 SEIU Long Island political director, she changed her party registration to the Working Families Party.

The one-percent rule wasn't the only source of revenue for the Nassau Republicans. Committeemen were obligated to sell tickets to the endless fundraisers, dinners, dances, cocktail parties and raffles.<sup>37</sup> One such committeeman was Alphonse D'Amato, a district leader. The former Presiding Officer of the Nassau County Legislature, Judy Jacobs, recalled that when she first became active in politics during the 1970s, she observed D'Amato having meetings in a local restaurant every Saturday morning. There, he sold tickets, gathered political gossip, and received requests and complaints.<sup>38</sup> As a district leader, he was obliged to pass information and complaints about lack of services to Margiotta. D'Amato was so responsive to resolving constituent complaints that it earned him the title of "Mr. Pothole." This moniker followed him even after he was elected to the US Senate.<sup>39</sup>

### Changing of the Guard

After Toby Coletti's decided not to run for a third term as president of the Federation, three candidates stepped forward to vie for the office. One of them was Harold Pryor, the head of the United Transportation Union at the Long Island Railroad. He said that he was running because he viewed the Federation as a "defunct organization in need of shaking up."<sup>40</sup> Another candidate was John Kennedy, the president of the Machinists Union Local at Republic Aviation. The likelihood of Kennedy winning the election was slim. His local, once a powerhouse in the Federation, had only 2,030 members remaining on Long Island. With the decline in membership of the defense industry unions, it would have been difficult for Kennedy to garner enough votes to put him over the top.<sup>41</sup> The third candidate was Anthony (Chick) Amodeo, the secretary-treasurer of Bartenders Local 164, the same local as former LIFED president

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<sup>37</sup> Alan Eysen, "Money, Men and Patronage Oil Nassau County's GOP Machine," *Newsday*, March 11, 1973.

<sup>38</sup> Judy Jacobs, interview by author, Feb. 28, 2013. Both Jacobs and an anonymous union leader recalled that former US Senator D'Amato was a just such a committeeman. She observed how every week, D'Amato would he would sit in a restaurant for the purpose of collecting contributions to the party from town and county employees.

<sup>39</sup> "Senator Pothole," *The Economist*, Aug. 14, 1997 Vol. 344, Issue 8030, 42; Alfonse D'Amato, *Power, Pasta and Politics: The World According to Senator Alfonse D'Amato*. (New York: Hyperion, 1995) 129.

<sup>40</sup> Maureen O'Neill, "New Mood Stirs LI Labor Federation," *Newsday*, May 6, 1969. Ibid. "Coletti and Campanaro Challenged." Frank Tooze was a member of IBEW Local 1049 who claimed he wanted to "revitalize the federation as a political entity." Tooze's candidacy didn't last long, however. Shortly after making the announcement, he dropped out of the race.

<sup>41</sup> Maureen O'Neill, "Pryor Loses Labor Leadership Bid," *Newsday*, Nov. 7, 1969.



Charles Browne.<sup>42</sup> Amodeo's had an advantage over the other candidates. He had the support of William DeKoning, Jr.<sup>43</sup> DeKoning had become president of the Nassau Suffolk Building Trades Council, and held the largest bloc of votes in the Federation. When the final tally was taken, it was DeKoning that helped Amodeo steamroll to victory.<sup>44</sup>

Amodeo's election was good news for Margiotta. Amodeo was tied to DeKoning and since Margiotta already had a close relationship with DeKoning, he was well-positioned to establish ties with labor's new leaders. Margiotta won over LIFED Executive Director Rocco Campanaro by promising that the Republican Party was committed to supporting organized labor in the county.<sup>45</sup> John Durso, who later became the president of a large retail union on Long Island and president of the Long Island Federation of Labor, recalled that Margiotta made sure that union leaders knew that he supported the labor movement and that Margiotta was always honest and forthright in his dealings with unions.<sup>46</sup>

### Nickerson's Fall

There was good news for the Nassau Republicans in 1969. Eugene Nickerson announced that instead of running for a fourth term as County Executive, he would pursue the Democratic Nomination for Governor of New York, his third attempt for higher office. To help in his campaign, he enlisted Jack

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<sup>42</sup> Austin Perlow, "Amodeo Beats Out Pryor in LI federation Vote." *Long Island Press*, Nov. 1969. Pryor had a reputation as a trouble-maker. In 1965, there was a dispute over the organization of Railway Carmen that led to George Meany, the president of the national AFL-CIO, to demand Pryor's ouster from the Long Island Federation of Labor and the New York City Central Labor Council. Damon Stetson, "Meany Demands Ouster Of Pryor: Asks Action Against Officer," *New York Times*, Aug. 31, 1965.

<sup>43</sup> Jack Altshul, "Damon and Pythias" *Newsday*, Nov. 11, 1969.

<sup>44</sup> John Cummings, "Union Boss DeKoning Jr. Indicted in Shakedown Rap," *Newsday*, June 3, 1969; James W. Sullivan, "DeKoning Guilty in Labor Case," *Newsday*, Oct. 22, 1970; Maureen O'Neill, "Pryor Loses Leadership Bid," *Newsday*, Nov 7, 1969; Ibid. "Amodeo Beats Out Pryor." DeKoning, Sr. was said to have "created some kind of order out of chaos" in the construction industry during the 1930s and the 1940s. His son, William Jr. had a different reputation. One labor leader said that DeKoning Jr. was "very reasonable. He keeps things in order in the construction business here." He was compared to Jimmy Hoffa as a labor leader "who looks after industries and get good wages for their men." Jon Margolis, "Labor on LI: Who's Who: A look at the men who guide Long Island's," *Newsday*, Jan. 28, 1969. Sadly, Coletti was killed in 1970 while driving on the Southern State Parkway. A car driving in the opposite direction jumped the median and crashed into his vehicle. "Toby Coletti: Headed LI Labor Federation," *Newsday*, Sept. 5, 1970.

<sup>45</sup> Lurana Campanaro, Interview with author, Aug. 14, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> John Durso, interview by author, March 29, 2012.

English, the man with the Kennedy connections. English resigned as Nassau County Democratic chairman, leaving a vacuum within the party which could only help the Republicans.<sup>47</sup>

As his successor, English selected his law partner, Marvin Cristenfeld.<sup>48</sup> It was not a good choice. Cristenfeld had none of the same charisma, energy, or connections as English. Most importantly, as Lurana Campanaro recalls, Cristenfeld was unknown in labor circles. While Rocco Campanaro and Cristenfeld were “friendly enough,” Campanaro felt “no kinship” with the new chairman.<sup>49</sup>

As Nickerson’s campaign manager, Jack English was confident that he would be able to get an endorsement from Teddy Kennedy that he believed would clinch the gubernatorial nomination for Nickerson. However, two days before he was to make the announcement, Kennedy decided instead to endorse Arthur Goldberg. English and Nickerson felt betrayed. Kennedy’s endorsement of Goldberg effectively killed Nickerson’s campaign. Supporters disappeared, and almost instantaneously, campaign contributions ran dry. Almost as quickly as it had begun, Nickerson’s campaign was over, marking the end of his political career.<sup>50</sup>

### Democrat Missteps

Cristenfeld’s inexperience widened the growing rift in the Democratic Party. To run for County Executive, the Democratic Party leaders first considered Michael Petito, the Oyster Bay Town Supervisor.

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<sup>47</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Sept 9, 2014; Dick Zander, “English Era Draws to a Close in Nassau Democratic Politics,” *Newsday*, June 30, 1969.

<sup>48</sup> Jerry Edgerton and Dick Zander, “Nassau Dems Pick Cristenfeld,” *Newsday*, July 3, 1969.

<sup>49</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Sept 9, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Jack English was also a state committeeman. At the Democratic nominating convention, he continued to support Nickerson despite the fact that Nickerson had pulled out of the race. His recalcitrance just caused further division among Democrats. Frank Lynn, “Dems Choose Goldberg in Bitter Party Session: Democrats Nominate,” *Newsday*, April 2, 1970. Lurana Campanaro recalled how Kennedy endorsement of Goldberg was viewed as a betrayal of English and Nickerson. Nickerson’s campaign chairman said that the news “hit us like a punch in the stomach.” Richard Reeves, “Nickerson and O’Dwyer Endorsed by a Coalition: Democratic Coalition,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1970; Richard Reeves, “Nickerson Drops Race for Governor: Nickerson Drops Race for Governor as Funds Lag,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1970; David L. Stebenne, *Arthur J. Goldberg: New Deal Liberal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 376-377. Goldberg chose to run for governor because according to a poll, there was a possibility of beating Rockefeller. In 1970, the Democratic nomination for governor was a hard-fought battle, reflective of the disorder among Democrats, and Goldberg was accused of being the candidate of the Democratic “bosses.” The New Coalition Democrats of New York did ultimately swung their support for Goldberg. Dick Zander, “Sutton to Back Goldberg’s Bid In Talk Today,” *Newsday*, April 30, 1970.

Petito, however, was too much of a centrist for the New Democratic Coalition.<sup>51</sup> They refused to support him, and instead launched an attack. County Executive Nickerson, eager to hold on to the NDC's support in his quest for the Democrats nomination for governor, stood by silently and said nothing in Petito's defense.<sup>52</sup> It was then that Jack English stepped in to salvage Petito's political career by persuading him to run for Family Court Judge.<sup>53</sup>

Margiotta took advantage of the Democrats infighting, and offered Petito a cross-endorsement by the Republicans in support of his race for judge. It was not a magnanimous gesture. Margiotta reckoned that by supporting Petito, the Democratic Party would be left without a viable candidate for County Executive.<sup>54</sup> Petito took Margiotta's offer, and in 1969, swept to victory on the Democratic, Republican, and Conservative Party line.<sup>55</sup>

Everything went as Margiotta had planned. With an open seat for County Executive, and Republicans nominated Ralph Caso for Nassau County Executive. As the Town Supervisor of Hempstead, the largest town in Nassau County, Caso was well-known and popular. He was affable and did not suffer from any self-imposed orthodoxy that would lead him to reject the endorsement of a third party.<sup>56</sup> Caso was a moderate Republican and was friendly with the leaders of organized labor. But he was no liberal. As Town Supervisor, he opposed state-mandated low-cost housing and high rises that struck terror into the hearts of homeowners. Instead, Caso supported more expensive and less dense of garden apartments.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Dick Zander, "Petito headed for Family Court Bench," *Newsday*, March 21, 1969. It wasn't just Petito's support of Humphrey that offended the NDC. Petito was on the far right of the Democratic spectrum. In December 1969, when the Grumman Corporation issued a statement favoring low-cost housing, a plan proposed by the NAACP in Oyster Bay, he asked, "Do they (Grumman) favor bringing ghetto people from the outside?" "Grumman Urges Low-Cost Housing," *Newsday*, Dec. 30, 1969.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Reeves, "Nickerson and O'Dwyer Endorsed by a Coalition: Democratic Coalition," *New York Times*, March 1, 1970.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. According to Lurana Campanaro, who was an active in the Nassau Democratic Party during this period, Jack English only conducted political business in his office. He wrote no letters and did not even discuss politics over the phone. Interview with Lurana Campanaro. According to newspaper reports, English and Petito did not get along. Jerry Edgerton, "English Cool to Plan To Delay Primary," *Newsday*, Feb. 4, 1969.

<sup>54</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author Sept. 9, 2014; Bob Bridge, "Judgeship Aim Of Oyster Bay GOP Chairman," *Newsday*, Feb. 2, 1968; Dick Zander, "Move Petito to Court Now, GOP Asks Gov," *Newsday*, June 21, 1969; "Republicans Back Petito For Family Court Spot," *Newsday*, April 2, 1969; Jerry Edgerton, "GOP Abandons Plan on Petito's Post," *Newsday*, Aug. 9, 1969.

<sup>55</sup> Manny Topol, "Petito Wins Post In Family Court," *Newsday*, Nov. 5, 1969. His opponent, running on the Liberal Party, received 15,190 votes to Petito's combined 390,483.

<sup>56</sup> "Caso OKs Backing By Libs In Spite Of Conservative Blast," *Newsday*, Aug. 13, 1963.

<sup>57</sup> Roy Silver, "Republicans Run Strong in Nassau: GOP Maintains Its Control of Supervisors," *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1969, Shelland, "The County Executive," 122.

The hapless Democrats were hard-pressed to find any candidate to run for County Executive in 1970. Finally, after searching for several months, party leaders convinced Andrew DiPaola, the Mayor of Glen Cove, to accept the nomination.<sup>58</sup> DiPaola was a reluctant and difficult candidate, and blundered from the very start of the campaign. First, he alienated the left-wing Democrats by needlessly declaring that his politics were to the right of Eugene Nickerson's. Secondly, he refused to accept cross-endorsements from any of the growing number of minor parties in Nassau County. Both of his actions annoyed Democratic Party leaders, who watched helplessly as DiPaola foolishly tossed away potential votes.<sup>59</sup>

During the campaign, the growing divisions within the Democratic Party caused even more problems for DiPaola. While on vacation in Puerto Rico, Judge Petito was murdered. Just before the election, his widow, Adeline Petito made a surprise announcement. She said that if her husband had lived, he would have supported the Republican nominee for County Executive, not Andrew DiPaola. Her motivation, she said, sprang from a deep disappointment in the left-wing drift of the Democratic Party. She explained her position by saying, "The Democratic Party never was—nor should it ever become—a home for the followers of the passing idols of the New Left."<sup>60</sup>

### Shifts in Labor Support

It was during the campaign that new voices in the Long Island Federation of Labor were first heard. The teachers unions in Nassau County, for example, were adamantly opposed to the Taylor Act's ban on strikes by public employees. They looked to support a candidate in favor of repeal and reform. The Democratic candidate for governor, Arthur Goldberg, had a long history in support of organized labor and promised that if elected, he would propose a new labor law to replace the Taylor Act.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Reno, "DiPaola Dem Pick for Nickerson Job," *Newsday*, April 8, 1970.

<sup>59</sup> Maureen O'Neill, "New Mood Stirs LI Labor Federation," *Newsday*, May 6, 1969. Robert Reno, "DiPaola Dem Pick For Nickerson Job," *Newsday*, April 8, 1970. DiPaola also said that he would not accept an endorsement from the Conservative Party.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Reno, "Caso Endorsed by Mrs. Petito: Campaign '70," *Newsday*, Oct. 6, 1970. Adeline Petito was the widow of Michael Petito. Michael Petito was murdered in Puerto Rico during the spring of 1970.

<sup>61</sup> "Goldberg Promises a New Labor Law," *New York Times*, Sept. 11, 1970.

Their position was at odds with building trades, who unequivocally supported the incumbent, Governor Nelson Rockefeller. During the late 1960s, Rockefeller had embarked on an enormous building plan of state offices and branches of the state college system, using only unionized construction trades. In Nassau County, the building trades were still bitter over the Federation's failure to endorse the governor in 1966. Back then, William DeKoning, Jr. had lobbied hard for Rockefeller but was blocked by defense industry union leaders who supported the Democrats.

Paul Rubin of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) led the fight for labor to support Goldberg in Nassau County. He blamed Rockefeller for the onerous provisions of the Taylor Act and held the Republican Party responsible for the law's harsh penalties. He was joined in his opposition to Rockefeller by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and the president of the State AFL-CIO, Raymond Corbett, who called the Taylor Act, a "slave labor bill."<sup>62</sup>

Rubin worked hard to get labor support for Goldberg. During the spring of 1970, he convinced the members of the Long Island Federation of Labor's executive board to support a resolution that Nassau County labor would not endorse or work for any candidate who supported the Taylor Act.<sup>63</sup> Despite the resolution, the Executive Board of the Long Island Federation of Labor unanimously endorsed Ralph Caso for County Executive, the first time that the Board had endorsed a Republican for county-wide office since 1959.

In September, when the Federation's fifty three unions representing 70,000 members, met at the Plumbers Hall in Mineola to decide on who labor would endorse, Rubin continued the fight on Goldberg's behalf. At this point in the campaign, it was an uphill struggle. Several Long Island locals, the State AFL-CIO, the State Building Trades Council, and the New York City Central Labor Council all announced their endorsement of Rockefeller.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Maureen O'Neill, "LI Delegates Split on Race," *Newsday*, Sept. 15, 1970; Maureen O'Neill, "LI Labor Backs Rocky, Caso," *Newsday*, Sept. 23, 1970; Maureen O'Neill, "Dem-Labor Love Affair Over," *Newsday*, Sept. 15, 1970.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. "LI Labor Backs Rocky."

<sup>64</sup> Maureen O'Neill, "Dem-Labor Love Affair Over: Campaign '70," *Newsday*, Sept. 15, 1970.

During the general meeting, the endorsement of Ralph Caso for County Executive met with little controversy. As Hempstead Town Supervisor, Caso had supported organized labor and even recognized public sector unions when they organized within the town. He frequented Federation events, attended meetings with the Federation's leaders to discuss labor issues and, over the years, developed strong personal relationships with union leaders.<sup>65</sup> Members of the Federation expressed confidence in his leadership, and each time he ran for re-election as supervisor, Caso had received the Federation's endorsement.<sup>66</sup>

When Marvin Cristenfeld finally realized that labor might not support the DiPaola, he began to exert heavy pressure on Rocco Campanaro to deliver the Fed's endorsement. Campanaro was a Democrat and active in the party, but he recognized that among the majority of the Federation's affiliates, there was little support for DiPaola. Neither Cristenfeld nor DiPaola were union members or had a history with organized labor. Campanaro determined that without a record of their support, the Federation could not endorse the Democrat.<sup>67</sup>

The only union to object to Caso's endorsement was Paul Rubin.<sup>68</sup> Caso had not signed on to the repeal and reform of the Taylor Act, and Rubin reminded everyone of the Federation's resolution to withhold support from candidates who failed to defend the right of public employees to strike. His suspicions of Ralph Caso was bolstered by the fact that during the transit strike in New York City in 1966, Margiotta had spoken out against strikes by public employees, and called for stiff penalties for government employees who walked off the job.

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<sup>65</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 12, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> "Two Years of Progress: Report to the Fifth Biennial Convention," Long Island Federation of Labor October 22–25, 1967. "A Documentary of Dedication to a Better Long Island," 6<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention, November 4–7, 1969.

<sup>67</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Sept. 9, 2014.

<sup>68</sup> The Plainview Federation of Teachers was affiliated with the Long Island Federation of Teachers and the United Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO. Dennis Hevesi, "School Strike in Plainview Gains Support," *Newsday*, March 1, 1966; Dennis Hevesi, "Board, Teachers Union Break Talks," *Newsday*, March 4, 1966. Maureen O'Neill, "LI Labor Backs Rocky, Caso," *Newsday*, Sept. 23, 1970. Another reason for Rubin's support for the Democratic candidate was that during the Plainview teachers strike in 1966, the first teachers strike on Long Island, ended only through the efforts of Michael Petito. It took Petito two and half hours to mediate the strike. After he announced the terms and the conditions that he was able to mediate between the union and the school superintendent, the teachers called off the strike and gave him a standing ovation. "Petito Works It Out," *Newsday*, March 14, 1966.

Rubin took to the floor to challenge the actions of the Executive Board, and questioned their commitment to public employee unions. He demanded to know if they had asked any of the candidates about their views of the Taylor Law. In response to Rubin, Frank Tooze, a member of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 1049, admitted that the candidates weren't asked about their views. But, he said, neither had any of them declared any opposition to the right of public employees to go on strike. Federation president Anthony Amodeo took a more conciliatory and direct approach. While describing DiPaola as a "nice, likeable guy," he said, "We don't see any past history to go on as far as labor is concerned."<sup>69</sup>

The teachers did not prevail. When the votes for County Executive were counted, Caso's long-standing relationship with local union leaders and his moderate Republican views had put him over the top. He received fifty-two votes to DiPaola's thirty-five. Caso received other union support as well. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, had 30,000 members living in Nassau County at the time, and they, too, endorsed Caso.<sup>70</sup>

The debate over labor's endorsement for governor of New York was far more controversial and contentious. Arguing on Goldberg's behalf, Paul Rubin pointed out that Goldberg had a long history as a friend of labor. More important was Goldberg's campaign promise that if elected, he would reform and repeal the Taylor Act.<sup>71</sup> When the votes were counted, the Rockefeller supporters won by only seven votes.<sup>72</sup> This was the first time that organized labor supported a Republican for *both* governor and county executive. But the narrow vote divided labor. Rubin and the teachers union persisted to campaign in support their candidates. What also endured was the resentment that the teachers union felt towards the labor leaders who failed to support the candidates opposed to the Taylor Act. Their resentment became a

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<sup>69</sup>Maureen O'Neill, "LI Labor Backs Rocky, Caso," *Newsday*, Sept. 23, 1970; Maureen O'Neill, "LI Delegates Split on Race," *Newsday*, Sept 15, 1970.

<sup>70</sup> "Caso Is Endorsed By Teamster Group," *New York Times*, Oct 22, 1970. The Teamsters were no affiliated with the Long Island Federation of Labor. They were expelled from the AFL-CIO in 1957.

<sup>71</sup> Maureen O'Neill, "LI Delegates Split on Race," *Newsday*, Sept. 15, 1970.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. "LI Labor Backs Rocky, Caso." Currently, COPE rules require a two-thirds vote for local candidates and a two-thirds vote for a recommendation for state and national candidates submitted to the state AFL-CIO for an endorsement.

permanent part of their relationship with the Federation's leadership, and would ultimately rip the organization apart.

Another outcome of the fight over Goldberg's endorsement was that it closed the door on what had been a long and fruitful relationship between the Nassau County Democrats and organized labor. The Democrats had always counted on their friends within the labor movement. But they had been the leaders of the defense industry unions, and once they were gone, the support of the teachers union, still young and growing, wasn't enough to sustain the relationship.

Missing from the battle over the repeal and reform of the Taylor Act were the nine thousand members of the Nassau County Civil Service Employees (CSEA). CSEA was not affiliated with the Long Island Federation of Labor. In fact, in their twenty-two years in the county, the association had never publicly supported any candidate for office. But by 1970, they were ready. The Nassau County chapter formed a committee of nine members, and prepared to make an endorsement.

The CSEA board members were cautious. Although Republicans outnumbered Democrats in the county, Flamenbaum thought that there was a likelihood that the Democrats could win again, just as they had in the past.<sup>73</sup> Wary of the outcome of the race for county executive, the board decided to remain neutral. However, the direction that they leaned was made clear when it came to endorsements for the state legislature. The Nassau County CSEA endorsed eleven Republicans and only two Democrats.<sup>74</sup>

On Election Day, Caso won by forty-two thousand votes. More than their victory at the polls, by getting the Federation's support, the Nassau Republicans received a new lease on life. Rockefeller did very well in Nassau County: he beat Goldberg by more than one hundred thousand votes.<sup>75</sup> These were numbers similar to what the Nassau Republican Party delivered during the height of J. Russel's Sprague chairmanship. Margiotta had something else to cheer about - his plan to retake the Town of Oyster Bay

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<sup>73</sup> Robert Reno, "Caso Blasts Those Belittling His Win," *Newsday*, Nov. 5, 1970.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Reno, "Nassau Union for 13 Hopefuls," *Newsday*, Oct. 23, 1970.

<sup>75</sup> Newspaper articles covering the race emphasized his poor showing. Caso shrugged off their criticism, saying, "Winning by one vote is enough to satisfy me." Roy Silver, "G.O.P. Sweeps Nassau Races; 50,000 Plurality for Caso Seen," *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 1970; Caso's low numbers showed that though Republicans were still weak on a local level. During the campaign, Margiotta recognized Caso's weakness and made sure that his candidate campaigned as part of the "Rockefeller-Caso" team. Alan Eysen, "Caso's Republicans," *Newsday*, Oct. 1, 1970.



worked that was hatched when he offered a cross-endorsement to Michael Petito came to fruition. The Republicans took back the Town Supervisor of Oyster Bay, winning the election handily, 50,074 to the Democrat's 34,451.<sup>76</sup>

Paul Rubin, who headed the Long Island Committee for Goldberg, blamed the Federation's leadership for all of the Democratic losses, while DiPaola attributed his loss to Arthur Goldberg, who he said "looked good on paper" but failed to inspire voters to pull the Democratic lever.<sup>77</sup> What they failed to say was that the Democratic Party was hopelessly divided. They couldn't even unite behind council candidates. In the Oyster Bay town council races, candidates ran as Liberals, Democrats and New Coalition Democrats.<sup>78</sup> Party leaders refused to recognize their failings with one Democratic Party leader saying that their problems were due to the party "moving too fast to the left and that we have too many Jews in high positions."<sup>79</sup>

Rubin also blamed the Federation was responsible for the rise of the anti-union Conservative Party on Long Island. In 1970, the Conservative Party candidate for US Senate, James L. Buckley, beat out Democrat Richard Ottinger and moderate Republican Charles Goodell to win the election. Buckley won Nassau County with forty-five percent of the vote, with the Democrats and moderate Republicans splitting the remaining fifty-four percent of the vote. Rubin argued that by supporting Republicans Rockefeller and Caso, the Federation "confused their own membership and contributed to the sharp swing to the right."<sup>80</sup> Former LIFED leader Anthony Mazzocchi, who helped form the Federation's first political action committee, agreed with Rubin's assessment of the election. Speaking from his home in Washington D.C., Mazzocchi observed that the Rockefeller-Goldberg fight had "diluted everyone's efforts" on Long island so that unions could not respond to the threat of a Conservative Party victory as

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<sup>76</sup> "Burke In; Dem to Join Oyster Bay Council," *Newsday*, Nov. 5, 1969.

<sup>77</sup> Reno, "Caso Blasts."

<sup>78</sup> The candidates for Oyster Bay Council defied party labels with Conservative, Liberal, Democrats, Republicans and New Coalition Democrats all running their own candidates. Bruce Lambert, "Labels Like a Maze In Oyster Bay Race: Campaign '70," *Newsday*, Oct. 19, 1970.

<sup>79</sup> Alan Eysen. "New Era of Dem Turmoil is Foreseen." *Newsday*, Oct. 7, 1971.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

quickly as they should have.<sup>81</sup> In reality, the Nassau Democratic Party didn't do too badly. DiPaola, despite his shortcomings, came within forty-two thousand votes of winning the election. But Cristenfeld was facing an impossible task. He came under constant criticism from the party's left wing and increasingly from the party's center.<sup>82</sup>

### Republicans Return

In 1971, Caso was sworn into office, and the Republicans took back control of county government. From the outset, Caso proved that he was a moderate Republican. One of his first actions was to re-appoint Democrat Robert MacGregor, LIFED's first president, as the County Labor Commissioner. Caso also broadened MacGregor's duties, giving him the responsibility to negotiate contracts with the new public employee unions.<sup>83</sup> Caso also showed that he was responsive to the changing times. During the campaign, Andrew DiPaola, the Democratic candidate for County Executive, ushered through an ordinance at a Board of Supervisors meeting outlawing sexual discrimination in Nassau County. Though Caso interpreted DiPaola's move as an attempt to corner the women's vote, after the election Caso established a Women's Division in county government and hired Lurana Campanaro as the director of the new department.<sup>84</sup>

While the Democrats were in power, the Republican patronage machine stayed intact, but without control of the county, it had sputtered. Following their victory, Ralph Caso and Joe Margiotta prepared to put it into full gear, opening the throttles to once again give out jobs in return for political support. Caso

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<sup>82</sup> Maureen O'Neill, "Unions Moved Too Late," *Newsday*, Nov. 5, 1970.

<sup>82</sup> Alan Eysen, "The Many Facets of Cristenfeld's Fall," *Newsday*, Feb. 20, 1973.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Reno, "Caso to Keep Dem in Labor Post," *Newsday*, Dec. 10, 1970. Alan Eysen, "Caso Appointments Show Who's Boss," *Newsday*, Dec. 31, 1970.

<sup>84</sup> "Nassau Outlaws Sex Discrimination," *Newsday*, Oct. 20, 1970. The ordinance was passed at a Board of Supervisors meeting which Ralph Caso could not attend. Lurana Campanaro interview with author Aug. 12, 2014. During the 1960's and 1970's, Lurana Campanaro had been an active Democrat. In 1966, she ran for Receiver of Taxes in Oyster Bay, the only woman on the ticket. The daughter of a union ironworker, Campanaro was a Stevenson Democrat, who later supported Kennedy. After taking a job in the Caso administration, Campanaro switched parties but, like so many others, held onto her Democratic views. She said that the largely white and middle class women's movement fit in well with white, middle class Nassau County. Chairman Margiotta recognized that the GOP lacked support among women. Alan Eysen, "Fewer and Fewer Grassroots for GOP," *Newsday*, March 12, 1973.

was the first county executive to have to negotiate with the newly-organized public sector unions.

Relations between Caso and the fourteen thousand members represented by CSEA got off to a shaky start. Even before he took office, in December 1970, CSEA sued the county and won a cost of living raise for county employees.<sup>85</sup>

Caso and Flamenbaum began bickering in public over raises for county employees. Within a year, Irving Flamenbaum declared that relations between the county and the CSEA were the worst they had been for the past twenty years.<sup>86</sup> One of the problems was that contracts were negotiated annually, with the result that the county and the union were locked in a state of constant negotiations. At one point, when he was looking to keep raises at a minimum, Caso offered to cut his own salary and “mothball” his official Cadillac limousine. Flamenbaum was not impressed. He responded by pointing out that the average salary of county workers was between \$7,000 and \$10,000 a year, while Caso’s annual salary was \$60,000.<sup>87</sup>

Flamenbaum was facing other problems as well. CSEA was fending off what seemed to them, continuous raids on their bargaining units by other unions. In the Plainview-Bethpage school district, they lost a bargaining unit of clerical workers to the AFT. Teamsters Local 237 defeated CSEA in an election to represent custodial and cafeteria workers.<sup>88</sup> In Valley Stream, the National Maritime Union challenged the CSEA local of sanitation workers.<sup>89</sup> Even when CSEA won, the votes were close, reflecting a loss of faith in CSEA’s leadership and an increasing militancy among the workers.<sup>90</sup>

In order to control the county, Caso began to make political decisions independent of Margiotta. He had always bristled at being characterized as under the control of the chairman, and looked to carve

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<sup>85</sup> “Nassau’s Employees Sue for Wage Boost,” *Newsday*, Dec. 22, 1970; Judith Bender, “Nassau CSEA Wins Cost-of-Living Raise,” *Newsday*, Jan 23, 1971.

<sup>86</sup> “County Union Chief Raps Caso,” *Newsday*, Dec. 21, 1971; “Nassau CSEA Talks Stalled,” *Newsday*, Sept. 14, 1972.

<sup>87</sup> Bradford W. O’Hearn, “Raise for Suffolk Legislators; Caso Cuts His Income a Bit: Caso Reduces His Own Income,” *Newsday*, Dec 11, 1974. Three years before, Caso and the Board of Supervisors gave themselves a raise under an emergency wage ordinance which allowed them to pass the ordinance without first disclosing its contents to the public. Robert Reno, “Nassau Board Hikes Its Salary: A ‘Sleeper’ Raise for Supervisors Put in Routine Ordinance,” *Newsday*, Jan 6, 1970.

<sup>88</sup> Drew Fetherston, “2 CSEA School Units Lose to Unions,” *Newsday*, Feb. 20, 1970.

<sup>89</sup> Maureen O’Neill, “Sanitation Landlubbers Eye Sea Union,” *Newsday*, March 16, 1971.

<sup>90</sup> “East Meadow CSEA Unit Beats Union,” *Newsday*, Feb. 25, 1970. CSEA kept the custodian buildings and grounds employees in the school district.

out an image as a potential candidate for state office.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, Margiotta fully expected that he would control all patronage in the county. According to Lurana Campanaro who worked in the Caso administration, Margiotta was a “power freak” who grew increasingly disturbed by Caso’s attempt to administer the county and control patronage without input from Margiotta.<sup>92</sup>

Once again the teachers challenged the Republican machine. Margiotta’s political control of the county was threatened as teachers struck in record numbers.<sup>93</sup> When Charles Jerabek, a Republican assemblyman from neighboring Suffolk County on Long Island began submitting anti-teacher legislation in the state assembly, Long Island teachers responded by raising thousands of dollars for the union’s political arm, the Voice of Teachers in Education (VOTE). Their plan was to fight Jerabek and defeat Long Island Republicans serving in the state legislature. When VOTE began to contribute thousands of dollars to Democratic candidates in Nassau County, Joe Margiotta became alarmed. To try to counter their activity, he encouraged several teachers, disgruntled with the leadership of the AFT, to form their own union. He invited them to a meeting to plan a new teachers union with them. But there was no follow-up meeting, and the plan died.<sup>94</sup>

The militancy of the Teachers Union disturbed Rocco Campanaro. Since their falling out during the 1970 campaign over labor’s endorsement of Rockefeller and Caso, Campanaro had a poor relationship with the teachers unions. He didn’t get along with Albert Shanker, the president of the United Federation of Teachers. Campanaro felt that Shanker and the teachers’ unions were putting too many demands on local government, and were moving too far and too fast.<sup>95</sup> It also didn’t help the teacher’s cause that Paul Rubin had become the head of the Long Island Federation of Teachers. He viewed himself as a militant, and even his own union was not seen as aggressive enough for him in the battle for workers’ rights.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Robert Reno, “A Tangle in the Party,” *Newsday*, Feb. 17, 1972.

<sup>92</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Sept. 9, 2014.

<sup>93</sup> Martin Buskin, “Teachers’ Militancy Spawning Strikes,” *Newsday*, May 21, 1970.

<sup>94</sup> Alan Eysen, “Margiotta Seeks to County Union,” *Newsday*, March 24, 1973; Dennis Gaffney, *Teachers United: The Rise of New York State United Teachers* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 51.

<sup>95</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug 26, 2014; Leonard Buder, “Shanker Courting Teachers On Island: Teachers Union Aims At L. I.,” *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 1971.

<sup>96</sup> “Shanker Has An LI Critic,” *Newsday*, Nov. 24, 1976. Rubin formed his own teacher’s alliance. “Militant Teachers Seek Unity,” *Newsday*, Jun 16, 1971.

According to Richard Ianuzzi, former president of the New York State United Teacher's Union NYSUT, the Nassau Republicans quickly came to the realization that "they have to have a relationship" with the teachers unions.<sup>97</sup> To mend fences, Margiotta made sure that by the 1974 elections for state office, Long Island Republicans serving in the assembly supported the teachers' agenda, including assemblyman and County Republican Chairman Margiotta. That year the state teachers' union endorsed Margiotta as well as five other Long Island Republicans for re-election to the state assembly.<sup>98</sup>

### Caso's Fall

Before Caso ran for re-election in 1973, he and Margiotta had established a truce. What worried Margiotta most was whether the Watergate hearings and possible illegal activities by Richard Nixon would influence local voters. Fortunately for the Nassau Republicans, the events in Washington had no bearing on the results. Caso was re-elected by a huge margin in 1973, leaving no doubt that the Republicans were now in charge.<sup>99</sup> But during Caso's second term, the sparring with Margiotta escalated. Soon their arguments spilled out into the view of the public until Caso decided he had enough. In a fit of pique, Caso fired the deputy county supervisor, Thomas DeVivo, and the county attorney, James Catterson. His action was tantamount to an act of war; DeVivo was not just Caso's deputy: he was also a close personal friend of Margiotta and served as the chairman's eyes and ears in the executive offices. As an additional message to Margiotta and his supporters, Caso blocked the promotion of Peter King, who had been in line to take Catterson's place.<sup>100</sup>

Peter King, who later was elected to represent Long Island's second congressional district, met Margiotta when both were still new to the political scene and his recollections provide some insight on

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<sup>97</sup> Richard Ianuzzi, interview by author, May 18, 2012.

<sup>98</sup> Alan Eysen, "Teachers Back 5 Republicans," *Newsday*, Aug. 23, 1974.

<sup>99</sup> Alan Eysen, "Despite Watergate, GOP Grows on LI," *Newsday*, April 8, 1975; James Sullivan, "A Landslide for Caso: GOP Sweeps Towns and County; Democrats Reclaim Long Beach," *Newsday*, Nov. 7, 1973. Caso had a 90,000 vote plurality over his Democratic opponent, William J. Deeley.

<sup>100</sup> Bruce Lambert, Jr., "Caso Fires Two Top Aides Over Loyalty to Margiotta: 2 Caso Firings ..." *Newsday*, Dec 31, 1976.

Margiotta's oversight of the Nassau Republican Party. Like so many other Long Islanders, King's parents moved to Long Island from Queens. His parents were "Al Smith" Democrats who supported the New Deal and voted for Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower. During his last two years of college, King worked on the railroads and became a member of the Brotherhood of Railway Workers. In college, King said he was a "Goldwater Republican." After completing his law degree, King married and moved to Seaford in 1971. King had his sights set on a career in local government, so when he asked friends and acquaintances how he should proceed, he was advised to send a note to Chairman Margiotta. To his surprise, he received an immediate response from the chairman, who told him to first contact his district leader, John O'Shaughnessy. The protocol of the party was that the district leader would first vet anyone looking for a patronage position. O'Shaughnessy worked in the county attorney's office, and he asked King if he would be interested in joining the staff. The offer was conditional; first King would have to be interviewed by Joe Margiotta and win his approval.

At his interview, King's first impression was that Margiotta was very "officious." But when he came to know Margiotta better, he realized that Margiotta always maintained a distinct formality. According to King, Margiotta always wore a jacket and tie and never raised his voice. Almost fifty years after his interview with Margiotta, King recalls that during their conversation, what Margiotta demanded in return for a patronage job was loyalty. If he were hired, Margiotta told him, King had to recognize that the job came from Margiotta, and not from anyone else. After the interview was over and he offered King the job, he said, "Maybe we'll run you for office someday."<sup>101</sup>

Following Caso's firing of Margiotta's allies, political hell broke loose in Nassau County that could have repercussions on the state Republican Party. During the evening that followed Caso's firing of Margiotta's men, Peter King and his wife decided to escape the swirling maelstrom around them. To calm their nerves they went to see a movie. When they returned home, their babysitter told them that Al D'Amato had called King on Margiotta's behalf. The babysitter had told D'Amato that the Kings had

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<sup>101</sup> Congressman Peter King, interview by author, March 28, 2013.

gone to see “Rocky,” after which the babysitter said that D’Amato continued to call—every fifteen minutes—hoping to reach King. When King came home and finally returned his call, D’Amato was irate. He demanded to know why King went to see the governor; they could solve the problems of the Margiotta–Caso feud on their own, he said, without involving Rockefeller. King couldn’t help but laugh. There had been a misunderstanding, he told D’Amato. He had gone to see the movie “Rocky,” not the governor. D’Amato was relieved. There were deep connections between the Nassau GOP and Rockefeller, but dragging the governor into the county’s political affairs would show weakness.<sup>102</sup>

Not only was Caso was challenging the party chairman, he was also alienating the public sector unions. He fought with the police union over a wage hike, and continued to tangle with CSEA.<sup>103</sup> During the 1975 fiscal crisis in neighboring New York City, Caso delivered a ten page speech in which he announced that there would be “drastic changes” towards county unions. He proclaimed that the Taylor Law would be strictly enforced and that the county would do away with graded pay raises. In his speech, he took a particularly hard line towards CSEA president Irving Flamenbaum leading Flamenbaum to publicly and uncharacteristically denounce Caso as an “SOB” and an opportunist of the lowest type.<sup>104</sup> A few months later, Flamenbaum announced the formation of a political action committee saying, “We’re learning that we’ve got to get politicians to respect us.”<sup>105</sup>

Soon, an all-out war for control of the Republican Party followed, and Margiotta prepared to deny Ralph Caso the Republican Party’s nomination for a third term. To replace Caso, Margiotta decided that Francis Purcell, the Town Supervisor of Hempstead, would become the new Nassau County Executive. Undaunted, Caso vowed to wage a primary. It was a heated campaign, and the candidates scrambled for support among their fellow Republicans. Caso believed that as an Italian he had an advantage among the

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<sup>102</sup> Bruce Lambert, “Caso Fires Two Top Aides Over Loyalty to Margiotta: 2 Caso Firings,” *Newsday*, Dec 31, 1976;

Bruce Lambert, Jr., “First Casualty in GOP War,” *Newsday*, Dec 28, 1976; Ibid. Peter King, interview, March 28, 2013.

<sup>103</sup> Bruce Lambert, “Purcell Given The Unofficial CSEA Backing,” *Newsday*, Feb 10, 1977; “Rift Reported Between Caso,” *Newsday*, Nov. 30, 1974.

<sup>104</sup> Bruce Lambert, “Caso: Big Changes Ahead for Unions,” *Newsday*, Nov.7, 1975.

<sup>105</sup> Kenneth Crowe, “Long Island Labor, Lacking Past Clout,” *Newsday*, Sept. 6, 1976.

county's Italian Americans, who comprised close to twenty five per cent of the population.<sup>106</sup> The Long Island Federation Labor and the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council took a neutral stand in the primary. Caso was still in charge of county construction contracts, and they believed that it didn't make sense to antagonize him.<sup>107</sup> CSEA also proclaimed neutrality, though Irving Flamenbaum declared that he "personally" supported Purcell. But it was clear where the unions stood when the head of the public works unit began to distribute bumper stickers that said, "Improve Nassau County, Dump Caso," and no one other than Caso objected.<sup>108</sup>

The results of the primary said it all; Purcell won handily. A "spoiler" in the race, a Republican who was asked to run by Margiotta to siphon votes away from Caso, came in second, while Caso himself was a distant third.<sup>109</sup>

During the election, the Long Island Federation of Labor had taken a neutral position, though Executive Director Rocco Campanaro and LIFED president Anthony Amodeo "personally" endorsed Purcell. The members of the Nassau-Suffolk Building trades Council also jumped on the Purcell bandwagon. As one union leader observed, there was a lot of "cooperation" during the campaign between organized labor and the Republican Party in Nassau County because of their personal relationship with Joe Margiotta.<sup>110</sup> And in October 1977, for the first time in the association's history, CSEA endorsed a candidate for Nassau County Executive, and announced its support of Francis Purcell.<sup>111</sup>

The importance of labor's support in the election was demonstrated when Margiotta was forced to take on the chairman of the Republican National Committee, William Brock, for criticisms of organized labor. Brock had sent out a letter to Republicans across the country accusing the AFL-CIO as "destroying

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<sup>106</sup> "Italian-American Voter Is Primary Concern," *Newsday*, Sept. 4, 1977; Vincenzo Milione. "The Changing Demographics of Italian-Americans in New York State, New York City and Long Island: 1980 and 1990," Summary of a speech presented at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the New York Sociological Society, Dowling College, Oakdale, New York: Oct. 15, 1994.

<sup>107</sup> Big Labor Is Ducking The Nassau Primaries," *Newsday*, May 9, 1977.

<sup>108</sup> Kenneth C. Crowe, "Labor Vote Strategy Is Varied," *Newsday*, Oct. 19, 1977. "Big Labor Is Ducking The Nassau Primaries," *Newsday*, May 9, 1977.

<sup>109</sup> Roy R. Silver. "Caso, the Low Man on the Nassau G.O.P. Totem Pole, Is Busily Trying to Climb Back Onto the Top," *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 1977. Purcell received 48,536 votes, Dunne received 31,072 and Caso received 29,174.

<sup>110</sup> Kenneth C. Crowe, "Labor Vote Strategy Is Varied," *Newsday*, Oct. 19, 1977.

<sup>111</sup> Kenneth C. Crowe. "CSEA Makes Island-Wide Endorsements," *Newsday*, Oct. 26, 1977; Kenneth Crowe. "Labor Support Is Shifting to Purcell," *Newsday*, Oct. 28, 1977.



the free enterprise system.” One labor leader reacted by saying that the letter, “makes it obvious to me that the weirdos of the right have a great hold on the Republican Party.” An outraged and disgusted Margiotta confronted the national chairman, and responded in a letter to him, saying how “shocked and distressed he was by its tone.” He chastised the RNC, accusing them of not understanding local politics. Furthermore he argues that if the Republican Party ever hoped to become a majority party, it was “essential that we receive support from organized labor and minorities.”<sup>112</sup>

### The Alliance Endures

Republicans in Nassau County learned an important lesson from Caso’s defeat – tangle with chairman Margiotta and get removed from office. Yet as Margiotta faced his own defeat, the party endured. During the 1970s, charges of corruption were leveled at labor, the Republicans and the Democratic Party. The accusations changed the dynamic of their relationships. In some instances the accusations caused permanent damage while in others, ties were solidified and strengthened. For Joe Margiotta, his aggressive efforts to build a political machine quickly became suspect and fell under the scrutiny of *Newsday*. The paper printed a lengthy expose that included a list of all of the favored friends and relatives of the leaders of the Republican Party who had received jobs and promotions in local government. The article detailed the one percent rule, and characterized Margiotta as a political boss who ruled with an iron fist. While the revelations contained in the article may have been news to some, for anyone in local government, they came as no surprise. Anywhere from fifty to seventy-five percent of Republican committeemen had jobs in local government. In fact Irving Flamenbaum dismissed any concerns over the system by saying, “We say that if you are a member, they (the GOP) can expect your support. We feel that everyone has the right to contribute voluntarily for a job...I mean for a party. If you

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<sup>112</sup> Alan Eysen, “LI GOP Fears Fallout Over Insult to Labor: GOP Urged to Undo Anti-Labor Letter,” *Newsday*, Oct. 12, 1977.

don't want to give anything, you don't have to. I find that people who discuss this with me are glad to support (the party). I can't see how a party can exist without contributions.”<sup>113</sup>

The woes of the Nassau Republicans continued to mount. Following an investigation involving 1,600 local government employees, an investigation found that several Republican committeemen and an aide to Margiotta had participated in a kickback scheme involving county employees forced to turn over one-percent of their salaries in exchange for jobs and promotions.<sup>114</sup> Two of the accused Republican committeemen accused were found guilty.<sup>115</sup> Shortly after the judgement, three county employees and a group called the Civil Service Merit Council of Long Island filed a thirty million dollar class action suit on behalf of the twenty-two thousand county employees against all of Nassau County's elected officials and party leaders.<sup>116</sup>

Problems arose for William DeKoning, Jr. too. He was indicted on charges of corruption and was forced to resign as head of the Operating Engineers and as the president of the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council. In 1970, he was replaced as head of Local 138, the Operating Engineers, and George Babcock, the president of the Suffolk County District Council of Carpenters was elected as the new head of the Building Trades Council.<sup>117</sup>

The change in leadership in the Operating Engineers and the Building Trades Council was significant. The new leaders were not heavy-handed, and were primarily interested in making sure that members received good union contracts. With the Republican Party in charge of the county, there was no reason to pursue a relationship with the Democratic Party. Moreover, it was now the Democratic Party that was viewed as corrupt. The party's chairman, Marvin Cristenfeld, was indicted for extortion. Even

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<sup>113</sup> Bob Wyrick, “Price for Public Job in Nassau: One Per Cent Cut for the Party: ONE DOLLAR,” *Newsday*, April 16, 1972; Alan Eysen, “Money, Men and Patronage Oil Nassau County's GOP Machine,” *Newsday*, March 11, 1973.

<sup>114</sup> Dan Hertzberg, Lambert, Bruce, “Nassau Republicans Indicted in Party Kickback Scheme,” *Newsday*, March 6, 1976.

<sup>115</sup> Maureen O'Neill, “2 Guilty in Kickback Case,” *Newsday*, May 28, 1977.

<sup>116</sup> Michael Unger, “Federal Judge to Hear GOP Collections Suit,” *Newsday*, June 28, 1977.

<sup>117</sup> Maureen O'Neill. “Building Unions Pick Suffolk Man as Chief,” *Newsday*, July 17, 1970; DeKoning quit the labor movement entirely and moved to Florida, where he died in 1979. George C. Goodman, Jr. “William C. DeKoning, Jr. Chief of Operating Engineers,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 1979.

so, he ignored the charges, and held on as chairman. Frustrated Democrats challenged his leadership, but they were so divided by ideology and ego that they were unable to form a coalition to defeat him.<sup>118</sup>

The federation was weakened by continuous allegations of illegal activities surrounding Anthony Amodeo. In 1975, he was indicted on charges of embezzling funds from his union, Local 164 of the Bartenders, Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union. He denied the charges, but the accusations marked the beginning of a long legal battle that he would have with the authorities.<sup>119</sup> There were several affiliates of the federation that were growing increasingly dissatisfied with Amodeo's leadership. Leading the challenge was the teachers union, but they failed to muster enough votes to defeat him at the federation convention.<sup>120</sup>

Events continued to worsen. Following a legal hearing, he was put on probation, leading the CWA and the Machinists to join the teachers' union campaign against Amodeo.<sup>121</sup> To placate the teachers, Amodeo included a teacher to serve on the Executive Board, Carol Roseman, President of the Half Hollows Teachers Association. Roseman became the first woman to sit on the board. However, her appointment did little to assuage his opponents; she found the board "stagnant" and in need of a shake-up.<sup>122</sup>

The teacher's union in Nassau County continued to engage in aggressive labor activities. In 1978, after negotiations between the Teachers Union and the Levittown School Board had failed, the local union President Martin Cullinan led the district teachers on an eight week strike. The strike was prohibited by the Taylor Act, and Martin was arrested and jailed. He served eight days until the governor commuted his sentence.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Manny Topol, "Cristenfeld Is Found Guilty of Extortion In Democratic Kickback Plan," *Newsday*, April 29, 1976.

<sup>119</sup> Jim Scovel, "3 LI Labor Union Officials Indicted in Misuse of Funds: LI Labor," *Newsday*, Feb. 5, 1975; "Union Officials Deny Charge Of Embezzlement," *Newsday*, Feb. 14, 1975.

<sup>120</sup> Alan Eysen, "Activism Comes to Public Unions," *Newsday*, *Newsday* Jan. 22, 1975; Daniel Kahn, "Conviviality and a Concern for Jobs," *Newsday*, Oct. 23, 1975; Thomas McCarthy, "'Child labor' blasted," *Long Island Press*, Oct. 23, 1975.

<sup>121</sup> "Official Gets Probation In Union-Fund Misuse," *Newsday*, Jan. 10, 1976.

<sup>122</sup> "LI Labor Group Elects First Woman to Board," *Newsday*, Nov. 18, 1977; letter from Carol Roseman to Rocco Campanaro Dated Nov. 17, 1978, Campanaro Files.

<sup>123</sup> Roy R. Silver, "Governor Frees Jailed Teacher Who Led 53-Day Long Island Strike: Spent 8 Days in Jail He Peeled," *New York Times*, Nov. 17, 1978. The Levittown school board president called the governor's action a "travesty of justice."

Cullinan was also a vice-president of the Long Island Federation of Labor. In support of Cullinan and the teachers union, the Federation sent out press releases “deploring the posture of the Levittown School Board.” They solicited contributions from area unions for help to pay for a full-page newspaper ad in support of the strike. Rocco Campanaro sent a Letter to the Editor in support of Cullinan and the teachers that was written for him by Carol Roseman of the Teacher’s Union. Unfortunately, the letter was never printed.<sup>124</sup>

The Federation’s support of the Levittown teachers strike notwithstanding, Cullinan and the teachers union remained hostile towards Amodeo. In August 1978, Cullinan accused Amodeo of using Federation stationery to invite guests to a fundraiser for a Republican candidate in Suffolk County. Cullinan claimed that Amodeo’s actions showed a “lack of respect for the Federation’s Executive Board and delegate body.” He further stated that, “your lack of respect for the membership is a serious flaw in a union leader and I intend to see that it does not happen again.”<sup>125</sup>

At the 1979 biennial convention of the Long Island Federation of Labor, a new affiliate was added to the executive board, the CSEA, adding approximately 60,000 new members to the Federation’s ranks. The year before, the state CSEA merged with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. The merger strengthened both organizations. Their rivalry was eliminated and by combining resources, CSEA immediately established a powerful presence in the state. The merger opened a door for Irving Flamenbaum. He became a CSEA regional representative. Even more significant was that as a result of the merger, CSEA was now an AFL-CIO union and joined the Long Island Federation

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<sup>124</sup>Letter from Marty Cullinan to Rocco Campanaro, signed June 15, 1978. Campanaro Files; Long Island Federation of Labor, Press Release Dated Sept. 29, 1978. Campanaro Files; Letter from Anthony Amodeo to Richard Carbone, Local 77 ILGWU, Dated Oct. 18, 1978; Draft Press Release, “Get the Levittown Kids Back To School,”(no date), Campanaro Files; Letter from Carol Roseman to Rocco Campanaro Dated Nov. 17, 1978, Campanaro Files; Letter from Francis Wood, Reader Service Editor, Newsday to Rocco Campanaro, dated Nov. 29, 1978. Campanaro Files.

<sup>125</sup> Letter from Martin Cullinan to Anthony Amodeo, Dated Aug. 14, 1978; Letter from Anthony Amodeo to Martin Cullinan, Dated Aug. 23, 1978. Amodeo said that it was only the typeface that was similar was to the Federation’s letterhead. The invitation was for Perry Duryea, the Republican candidate for governor. The Federation had not made an endorsement in the race.

of Labor.<sup>126</sup> The new president of Nassau County CSEA, Nicholas Abbatiello, was elected as a vice-president of the Federation and given a seat on the Executive Board.

During the convention, Martin Cullinan once again tried to put together a coalition of unions to oppose Amodeo. One of their biggest complaints was Amodeo's ties to the Republican Party. Joe Margiotta added fuel to the fire. While attending a meeting of the national Republican Party in Detroit, Margiotta explained to the group that to get labor's support for Republican candidates, it was necessary to "hold parties and buy them drinks." When his comments reached the local papers, he tried to back-pedal, but his apology rang hollow and the insult stuck.<sup>127</sup>

One of Cullinan's allies, Jan Pierce of the Communication Workers of America CWA, argued that for the labor movement to go anywhere, they needed to be involved with the Democrats. When Pierce tried to muster up the necessary votes, he discovered was that while change in the Federation's leadership was recognized as necessary, many of the private sector unions, particularly the building trades, were "suspicious" of a teacher running the federation. Without the necessary votes, Cullinan decided not to run and Anthony Amodeo was once again re-elected as president.<sup>128</sup>

While the accusations against Amodeo were serious, organized labor's reluctance to shed his leadership was perhaps due to the fact that there were more pressing matters facing the workers in Nassau County. Unemployment in the county had reached catastrophic proportions.<sup>129</sup> Unionized workers in the defense industry were down to only five thousand two hundred members. The near bankruptcy of New York City during the mid-1970s brought construction to a near standstill in the metropolitan region, and fifty per cent of the members of the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades Council were unemployed. By the

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<sup>126</sup> Patrick Brasley, "Union Merger Seen as Bid for Power on LI," *Newsday*, April 23, 1978. It didn't help relations between the teacher's union and CSEA in Nassau County that PEF was financed by the New York State United Teachers Union. Irving Flamenbaum moved to become a regional representative. Kenneth Crowe, "CSEA's 'Demise Is Predicted By Raiding Unions,'" *C Newsday*, April 14, 1978.

<sup>127</sup> Dick Zander, "Carey Wins Major Labor Support," *Newsday*, Aug. 31, 1978.

<sup>128</sup> Kenneth Crowe, "LI Labor Unit: Power or Just Paper," *Newsday*, Feb. 25, 1979; Kenneth Crowe, "LI Labor Federation to Hold Elections," *Newsday*, Oct. 29, 1979; Kenneth Crowe, "Union Official Backs Casinos," *Newsday*, Nov. 1, 1979.

<sup>129</sup> Daniel Kahn, "Militancy in the Air At Labor Parley," *Newsday*, Oct. 21, 1975; "Jobs top convention item for LI Labor federation," *Long Island Press*, Oct. 19, 1975.

end of the decade, conditions had not yet improved leading union leaders to focus on maintaining their members, rather than who held the reins of leadership in the Long Island Federation of Labor.<sup>130</sup>

By the early 1980's, the teachers' union in Nassau County had had enough. Local teacher's union leader Martin Cullinan announced that he would challenge of Anthony Amodeo for the Presidency of the Long island Federation of Labor. In a letter sent to the Executive Board of the Long Island Federation of Labor dated June 1, 1983, Cullinan promised to bring "lively, enthusiastic, new direction" to the board. Among his supporters he counted the head of the Long Island Teachers, the IBEW, CSEA, SEIU, IATSE, the Operating Engineers, the Painters, the Carpenters, and ILGWU. Amodeo had always counted on the building trades, and the endorsement by some of their members of Cullinan's candidacy was a clear rejection.<sup>131</sup>

Almost immediately, Cullinan faced resistance. When he asked for a list of the delegates who had paid their per capita dues to the Federation, he discovered a sudden influx of 40,000 members from Amodeo's local.<sup>132</sup> He protested the sudden presence of the new members, but he was ignored. At the Federation's convention that was held on October 19, 1983, Amodeo received 106,480 votes to Cullinan's 31,967.<sup>133</sup>

Cullinan lost the battle but he continued to wage war on Amodeo. In response to his defeat, he and a few others formed a "rump" organization called the Long Island Community Labor Committee as a parallel labor federation in Nassau County. Rocco Campanaro contacted Regional Director of the ALF-CIO, Humphrey Donahue if the organization had any legitimacy. Donahue's response pointed out that the AFL-CIO recognized only one central body representing organized labor on Long Island.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>Charles Rabb, "LI's Defense Industry Resists Unions," *Newsday*, Dec. 3, 1974; Thomas McCarthy, "Campanaro: Default blow to job chances," *Long Island Press*, Oct. 21, 1975.

Kenneth C. Crowe, "Long Island Labor, Lacking Past Clout," *Newsday*, Sept. 6, 1976.

<sup>131</sup> Letter from Martin Cullinan to Executive Board Member, Dated June 1, 1983. Campanaro Files; Ken Crowe, "Labor Sleight of hand in upcoming Federation vote," *Newsday*, July 25, 1983.

<sup>132</sup> Letter from Martin Cullinan to "Brother," Dated Oct. 7, 1983. Campanaro Files.

<sup>133</sup> Letter from Nickolas M. Abondolo, Chairman of the Nomination and Election Committee of the 10<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Long Island Federation of Labor to Rocco Campanaro, Dated Nov. 10, 1983; List of delegate votes submitted by Nickolas Abondolo in a letter to "Dear Brothers and Sisters," Dated Nov. 1983, Campanaro Files.

<sup>134</sup> Letter from Humphrey Donahue to Rocco Campanaro, Dated June 12, 1984.

Amodeo and the Federation struck back at Cullinan. During Cullinan's campaign for re-election as president of his local, he was suddenly challenged. Cullinan won his election, but he suspected that his opponent was financed by the leadership of the Federation.<sup>135</sup>

While Amodeo managed to hold onto his office, Joe Margiotta did not fare as well. In 1980 Margiotta was indicted on extortion charges. One of the main witnesses against him was Ralph Caso.<sup>136</sup> Over the next two years, Margiotta battled the charges. Finally, in 1983, after losing his third and last court appeal, Margiotta was sentenced to two years in prison. To replace him, he chose Joe Mondello, a man who had served as his driver and right-hand man. Mondello's role, according to some party insiders, was to keep Margiotta's seat warm until his release.<sup>137</sup>

Joe Margiotta was granted early release from prison in 1984. He had been granted parole, and when he went back to see his friends in the Nassau County Republican Party he found that Joe Mondello was unwilling to step aside to return Margiotta to power. Like a man without a country, he tried to stay relevant by holding meetings with old allies, but nothing came of it. At one point, the Nassau-Suffolk Building Trades considered hiring him as a consultant, but backed off when they were advised that they could hire a convicted felon.<sup>138</sup>

The new chairman, Joe Mondello, was a product of the Republican machine but did little to try to re-capture the party's past glory. Instead, candidates running in Nassau County, regardless of the office continued to seek the support of the building trades and public sector unions. In this way, the alliance between the Nassau Republicans and organized labor endured, as the political machine continued to hum along into the twenty-first century.

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<sup>135</sup> Kenneth C Crowe, "Labor: CLOSEUP Teachers Union Seeking to Split From LI Group," *Newsday*, Nov. 14, 1985.

<sup>136</sup> Jim O'Neill, Rita Ciolli, "Margiotta Indicted: Indictment of Margiotta Obtained in Fee-Splitting," *Newsday*, Nov. 25, 1980; Leslie Maitland, "Margiotta and Ex-Judge Indicted In Alleged L.I. Insurance Fraud," *The New York Times*, Nov. 25, 1980;

<sup>137</sup> Adrian Peracchio, "Margiotta Out: Nassau GOP Kingmaker Resigns After Supreme Court," *Newsday*, May 3, 1983.

<sup>138</sup> Irving Long, Rex Smith, "Mondello Vows to Keep Post," *Newsday*, May 10, 1984; Irving Long, "Labor Group Explores Hiring Margiotta," *Newsday*, Aug. 13, 1984.



Democratic presidential nominee Hubert Humphrey makes a stop at a rally on Long Island organized by the Long Island Federation of Labor. To Humphrey's left in the checked jacket is LIFED Executive Director Rocco Campanaro and LIFED President Toby Coletti. (Campanaro Files).



## Conclusion

This dissertation has traced the evolution of the enduring century-old alliance between organized labor and Nassau County Republicans. When G. Wilbur Doughty set out to build the Nassau County Republican Party in the early twentieth century, he found success by establishing an alliance with workers and immigrants. As an admirer and supporter of Theodore Roosevelt, Doughty eschewed the anti-labor approach of the “Old Guard” wing of the Republican Party. Instead, he offered working people and immigrants a path to upward mobility and economic security in exchange for their support of the Nassau Republicans. Where no patronage existed—unlike the cities—Doughty established it with road building and construction projects which he used as a basis for a political machine. Wealthy estate owners participated in expanding the party as well when they forced their employees to vote for the Republicans. During the 1920s Robert Moses’ massive developments of roads, parks and bridges in Nassau County provided thousands of new jobs that contributed to the Nassau County Republican machine. It is in the 1920s that Nassau County Republicans established their ties to the conservative wing of organized labor.

When Doughty’s nephew, J. Russel Sprague, became county chairman in the 1930s he continued and expanded Doughty’s approach to party-building and reinforced his emphasis on ties with the building trades unions. In so doing, he kept Nassau County Republican even as other regions moved Democratic. To offset the national turn toward the Democratic Party, Sprague appropriated New Deal relief programs and delivering them to county constituents in Republican wrapping. He reached out to immigrants, as had his uncle, and when construction workers began to organize into unions, he joined them in their battle for prevailing wage rates on WPA projects. These actions ensured strong ties with AFL labor leader William DeKoning. With union support, Sprague reshaped local government to serve the party interests. The Nassau County Republicans became so powerful they were drawn onto the state and national stage and influenced the national agenda.

World War II brought a steady and dramatic rise in the defense industry in Nassau County; a suburban boom population soon followed as workers flocked to Nassau County for jobs. Union organizers, mostly Democrats, arrived from New York City to form new, industrial CIO unions among the workers. At first, they didn't challenge the moderate Republican control of the county, in part because DeKoning remained the most powerful leader of the organized labor movement. During the early 1950s, however, DeKoning and Sprague both were confronted with accusations of malfeasance. DeKoning was forced out as leader of the Nassau County labor movement. Sprague was stripped of his seat on the Republican National Committee. With that, one of the strongest voices for moderate Republicanism on a national level was gone.

Following the fall of DeKoning and Sprague, Democratic leaders of the industrial unions began to work towards increasing labor's voice in Nassau County politics. In 1959, labor unions in Nassau County formed the Long Island Federation of Labor. Many of the leaders established a bond with the Nassau Democratic Party. In 1961, their new partnership was successful in eliminating Republican control of the county seat. No longer in control of the county, the moderate Nassau Republicans lost what remaining influence they had in the national party.

Yet the Democrats could not sustain their control in Nassau County. Their reign had ebbed by the end of the 1960s. Lyndon Johnson carried the county in the 1964 presidential election, only the second time that the county voted for a Democrat for president since 1912, but the Democratic Party declined in Nassau County as industrial jobs vanished and the Vietnam War divided the Party. The Nassau Republican Party's new chairman, Joe Margiotta, rebuilt the Republican majority by recognizing the emerging public sector unions and re-establishing the ties between the moderate Nassau Republicans and organized labor. By 1970, the Republicans won the County Executive seat. Throughout the 1970s Margiotta ruled over the Nassau Republican Party with a heavy hand, demanding loyalty and discipline. Despite some dissent and complaints from public employees that the party took one-percent of their salary, the partnership continued. The machine and the political culture he established endured even after his career in politics ended in 1983 with his prison sentence.

Margiotta's replacement, Joe Mondello, continued Margiotta's pragmatic politics into the 1980s and beyond. He elevated personal relationships and supported organized labor as the moderate Nassau Republicans of the past had done. He permitted local Republican candidates and elected officials to cherry-pick specific local issues that they would support in order to get labor's endorsement. The personal ties between Nassau Republicans and union leaders reflected the transactional relationship that had historically defined the moderate politics of the Republican machine. Lurana Campanaro observed that there was a continuous "camaraderie" between the unions and the politicians that encouraged them to come to an accommodation.<sup>139</sup> Bill Hennessey, President and General Manager at Local 342 Long Island Public Service Employees ILA AFL-CIO recalled that early in his career, he was told by a party leader that his union could get anything as long they supported the Republicans.<sup>140</sup> As the president of one Teamster local observed, personal relationships were a far better tool in negotiations than party relations.<sup>141</sup>

CSEA and other public sector unions supported Republican candidates as well. In 1997, CSEA briefly considered endorsing Democratic candidates when some doubts arose about union support among some of the Republican candidates. To forestall a move to the Democrats a hurried meeting was arranged between the county chairman and CSEA and the matter was resolved in the Republican's favor.<sup>142</sup>

By the twenty-first century, however, it was not clear what the Republicans stood for other than transactionalism. In many ways, they were neither moderate nor progressive. In 2012, Bobby Rauff, the CSEA President in Oyster Bay learned that he had violated the unwritten but new rules of the party – "it's about doing what's good for the party."<sup>143</sup> A registered Republican like his father, Rauff came up through the ranks in the usual way. He began to push for his local to endorse pro-union candidates, not just Republicans. It was not received well by Republican Party leaders, and he was ostracized.

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<sup>139</sup> Lurana Campanaro, interview by author, Aug. 26, 2014

<sup>140</sup> Bill Hennessey, interview by author, May 23, 2012.

<sup>141</sup> Richard Hendershot, interview by author, Aug. 20, 2013.

<sup>142</sup> Irving Long, "Around The Island / Politics & Power," *Newsday*, Sept. 4, 1997.

<sup>143</sup> Robert Rauff, interview by author, Feb 16, 2012.

In 2016, county chairman Joe Mondello endorsed Donald Trump for president, a far cry from the days when Republican chairmen supported moderate Republicans like Teddy Roosevelt and Tom Dewey. Their choice was misguided, however, and Democrat Hillary Clinton beat Trump in Nassau County by over fifty thousand votes.<sup>144</sup> The Republican defeat hinged in part on the changing demographics of the county. According to the 2012 census, 51.7 percent of all immigrants in Nassau County, are from El Salvador, India, China, Haiti, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Italy, Honduras, Colombia, and Korea; and they represent over nineteen per cent of the population.<sup>145</sup> Latinos represent over seventeen per cent of Nassau County's population. Unlike their predecessors, G. Wilbur Doughty and J. Russel Sprague, Nassau Republicans had not reached out to the new immigrants in the Latino community. When asked about by the increasing number of Latinos in his congressional district, Congressman Peter King was flummoxed and said, "I know who the leaders are in the Black and Jewish communities, but I'm not really sure who to speak to in the Hispanic communities."<sup>146</sup> The national Republican Party's turn against Latino immigrants only added to his quandary.

In 2017, the Democrats returned to power in the county as voters elected a Democrat, Laura Curran, the first woman Nassau County Executive. According to one leader of the Nassau Republican Party, the Republican loss was due to a lack of party discipline. Committeemen still collected contributions from town committee members and government employees but the money they received was much less than in the days of Joe Margiotta. In the past, the party chairman controlled the purse strings. Now, there is no purse and there are no strings for the party to attach to a candidate.<sup>147</sup> Eighty year old Joe Mondello departed Nassau County, taking with him the last remnants of the once-powerful Republican machine. In return for his support, President Trump awarded Joe Mondello with an ambassadorship to Trinidad and Tobago.

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<sup>144</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.elections.ny.gov/NYSBOE/elections/2016/General/2016President.pdf>

<sup>145</sup> Retrieved from: <https://longislandreport.org/news/latin-american-immigrants-in-nassau-county-increase-19-percent/19280>.

<sup>146</sup> Congressman Peter King, interview by author, March 28, 2013.

<sup>147</sup> Anonymous, interview by author, Feb. 5, 2013.

There remain local moderate Republican candidates who, with union backgrounds, still support organized labor. But they are virtually invisible on the state and national landscape, a growing anomaly within their party. Unions, too, have moved away from the Republicans. As the national party has moved to the right, some Nassau Republicans have moved with them. But there are those within the party who believe that the rightward drift by Nassau Republicans is a mistake. As one party leader observed, a “South Carolina-style Republican” could “never win in New York.”<sup>148</sup>

The political landscape in Nassau County has changed. Many State Republican leaders no longer look for union support, and if they do, limit it to a handful of unions. Many have been caught up in the lurch to the right of the national party. The Republican leader of the state senate, John Flanagan, went so far as to call New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) “evil,” while Congressman Peter King, who once boasted of his support for unions, no longer attends functions at the Long Island Federation of Labor. While there are still pockets of strong Republican support in Nassau County, voters are moving increasingly to the Democratic column. During the 2018 elections, unions generally supported Democrats for state office.

In the past, when the Nassau Republicans lost power, they rebuilt support among voters by reaching out to unions and immigrants. It may be that they will change course and once again concentrate on attracting voters by espousing moderate political views and standing in opposition to the right-wing of the Republican Party. In the meantime, however, the Nassau Republican machine continues to sputter along, running on the fumes of past glory.

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<sup>148</sup> Anonymous member of the Nassau Republican County Committee, interview by author, Feb. 3, 2013.

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