

Episode 8: Organized Money I: Money Power & Fundraising

[00:00:05] Hi, my name is Luke Bretherton and

[00:00:08] this is the Listen Organize Act podcast, which focuses on the history and contemporary practice of organizing in Democratic politics. This is the first of two episodes on money and politics. Now, money politics are inextricably woven together and have a complicated, often troubled and troubling relationship. Which raises the questions I'll be exploring. How can we ensure money serves people rather than people serving money? And how can we hold those who hold concentrations of economic power, whether in the market or the state sector, accountable for their use and distribution of money? And then how can the work of Democratic politics be funded and paid for without depending on the patronage of either the state or the wealthy? Joining me today to explore these questions are Janet Hirsche and Joe Rubio. Janet is a leader with the IAF affiliate One L.A. through her participation in a synagogue temple. Isiah Joe is a senior organizer with the WSW Industrial Areas Foundation and supervises if projects in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas. So join me now for this episode of the Lesson Organize Act podcast in which I discuss organized money.

[00:01:36] Danny, great to have you on the listen that. Thanks so much for taking the time to talk to me today. And it's great. Great to have you here and beginning with you, Joe. Can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and how you came to be involved in community organizing?

[00:01:52] Well, great to be with you, Luke, and thank you for the invitation. I'm a native of El Paso, Texas, where I was born, but ended up also being raised in Austin and in Galveston County, the southeast, just southeast of Houston. And in a community that was fairly diverse, Anglo, African-American and Mexican-American, a mix between working class folks in the petrochemical industry there on the Gulf Coast, as well as a lot of families who worked in the technology sector and NASA and really grew up in a part of the state where we began to see it shift from being a yellow dog Democrat community to where the religious right began to come in and really make their way into institutions like city councils and school districts and begin to see how the state changed. After college, I moved into Houston and working in a Catholic parish in the shadow of downtown and Houston, first in six ward and an organizing effort was started. Very young organizer named Joe Higgs, or I got introduced to was beginning to put together an action with local neighbors of mine to close down some very dangerous cantinas and bars where there was drug running, prostitution, dangerous buildings and, you know, neighborhood safety issues. And I just follow that action. And Houston has no zoning, which makes it problematic. But the way that particularly the bars and cantinas were dealt with is that we were able to show that they had were in violation of their liquor license and those those establishments down. And it was the first time that that neighborhood felt like it had won something. And there was a great celebration afterwards. And there is something to this because our neighborhood began to transform. So what began attending meetings with the Metropolitan Organization, which is the IAF affiliate in Houston, and began talking seriously about the beginning of trial as an organizer, which took me to San Antonio to work with the cops and metro organizations. And that was a very formative experience to me in the early 90s. But I think what I found most interesting during that period of time was the cops and metro leaders were much more interested in meeting with business leaders. All right. Than they were with political officials. They understood that the power in that community really resided in the business establishment. The leaders of Frost book us a Broadway bank, some of the utilities there and meeting with the mayor, the city council and others who were important.

But because of term limits and other things, they knew that the business summit was going to be longstanding and those political officials were going to come and go.

[00:04:37] But I know this very is very insightful, that kind of the long standing influence of the kind of established money power there over against the kind of seasonal changes that were of political leaders.

[00:04:48] Well, into this conversation, we're going to be talking about money. It was always very instructive to me as a young organizer is seeing the sophistication that these leaders operated with, in the conversations with business leaders and quite frankly, in the sizable investment the business community was able to make and willing to make in the organization.

[00:05:08] We've been talking about kind of this problem of money, power and the kind of concentration of of money power. But obviously, that's the kind of looking at it at a systemic level and the role of corporate interests at that kind of systemic impacts it has. But people are complex. And obviously there are a multitude of stories in organizing work of people with major roles in corporations who are also part of congregations. Could you just talk a little bit about in a sense, it's a it's it's the negotiation of that and how we can perhaps make a distinction between the systemic role of money, power and actual engaging with decision makers as human beings who might also be members of congregations.

[00:05:58] Power operates institutionally. And so, you know, as we look at the local economy, you will have bankers, developers, health care officials and others. But we often find that there are so CEOs and the CFOs and their board of directors or in our churches and our congregations, they have a store. Some of them come from an immigrant background, some of them struggle. Some of them have family members who are taking it on the chin in the last two economic downturns. There's ways to have a conversation, understand their interest beyond just their corporate role. And many of them are allies, if we can get into that type of conversation. So sitting down with them and having access to them is important so that we begin to understand that there's a particular banker here in Arizona who comes from a farm worker background and really values the work on immigration, but feels compromised because of kind of his look at the corporate straightjacket, which basically makes him a little bit vulnerable to the nativist movement who have threatened in the past the boycott. So, you know, we can become important partners in that in that work. Part of it is, is that while the CEO or CFO may change whichever entity it is, that institution's still going to maintain power. But we have to figure out how to work with that particular person or particular official and to not stereotype understand their interests. And most of all, not to demonize.

[00:07:32] It's excellent to tell to you. Can you tell me you're living in L.A. at the moment? Tell me a little bit of your story and and how you came to be involved in organizing.

[00:07:41] So I grew up in Zimbabwe, formerly a British colony, Rhodesia, and I had a really rather an unhappy childhood. I was sent to boarding school at the age of sort of four and a half. So my sense of family was never very secure and lived through a civil war. I went to college in South Africa and one of the sort of constant throughout that part of my life and much of my life really was the feeling of being sort of an outsider and rather sort of powerless. The first place I was ever allowed to vote, actually, was America. I never voted anywhere else. So that was like a huge, big deal for me. And then I got on sort of with my life. I worked for an immigration attorney, so I was very sort of involved in that part,

watched how immigration went from being sort of a viable to really difficult to get. And then it was really only when my children went into middle school and I had decided to keep with the local public schools that I became interested in organizing my temple. Was interested in trying to encourage more people who looked like me to put their children in the middle school because normally they were happy with the elementary schools, but then when middle school came, they sort of went private. And that was when I found one ally. I didn't realize, of course, the first time I went to a meeting, it was, do you care about public schools? And I went showed up. And of course, that was a house meeting. I had no idea then. And it really did change my life. It changed my relationship with my my synagogue that I'd been a member for many years before finding this. And and it was through the organizing work with sort of other leaders from across Los Angeles County, which is huge, that I learned that we can shape the way that our city operates and we can stand up for our communities. And that has enabled me to sort of have more agency in the world to no longer feel powerless. So really, it did it gave my life purpose.

[00:09:37] It's saying we're

[00:09:38] discussing the interaction of money and politics in this episode. So I want to begin by reflecting with you on the perennial problem of how political power gets concentrated in the hands of the wealthy or plutocrats or the one percent and even more so in the hands of large private corporations and Wall Street or the kind of financial services industry, what's sometimes referred to collectively as money power. Joe, how do you think about this concentration of money, power in the hands of the few? And what's the role of Democratic politics in challenging that concentration?

[00:10:15] Well, in organizing, we talk about power illegitimately in two forms, organized people and organize money. And we think both are important to think about because it's a mistake to think that organizing is just about organized people. We're trying to create an ongoing concern. And, you know, much of our work is based locally. And so we look at how power operates and organized money, particular in local markets, as well as national and regional. And historically, you will see that there is always a concentration of organized money. The question is, what is there to compete with it or to help rein it in? And we're in a period right now that may be similar to the roaring 20s in terms of what you see Wall Street and big tech Silicon Valley. And, you know, some of these corporations, particularly those who have done very well during the pandemic and how they're reshaping the economy and labor markets. Even with all the. We have an obligation if democracy is going to work, to organize and to put together organizations that will, in a sense, sit at the table, at least locally, to be able to shape what life looks like for our families and communities. And we think that we do that well. This will also have national implications. We can talk more about that. But democracy requires that there be competing interests and certainly corporate money and corporate power will probably always be part of that configuration. The question for us is, are we going to put together you don't have a constituency that comes primarily out of the civic sector that will be there to help navigate and negotiate for our families and communities.

[00:12:12] So something that about the kind of representation of interests if money, power and corporate interests, there's a particular set of interests they have, we might say the state has a set of particular set of interests. Who is at the negotiating table, who's who's representing a kind of broad coalition of interests which are not simply a kind of collapsible into either the kind of dominant forces in the economy or the kind of state state elements as well. And so that that sense then of how how is organizing involved in ensuring that

there's a genuine representation of diverse interests. And it's not we're not simply being acted upon by either state or dominant economic powers.

[00:12:57] Well, that we don't abdicate that space, just the corporate interests. Yeah, Luke realize that there if we take advantage of our right to, you know, as citizens and to organize and to build organizations that have power so that we can be represented at the table, no one is going to give that to government. But we think that the building of broad based organizations is creating a vehicle that is going to be durable, hopefully last generation, so that our families will be able to have a seat at the table and be able to really reimagine what our communities look like.

[00:13:32] And so I guess I guess I guess part partly in that is telling the powerful is summed up in the kind of slogan from yesteryear that what's good for General Motors is good for America. And there's this kind of powerful story that what's good for corporate interest is, in a sense, good for everyone. And the dominance of the economy is shaping life. If we have a buoyant economy, then everything goes well. And is there something that if I ask you this, I mean, is there something there that actually that isn't a true story, that actually what is good for the common life, what's good for the common good isn't always is, sometimes is, but not always dovetails into what's good for the corporate sector. Is it that something of what's kind of there in the organizing vision?

[00:14:20] Yeah, yeah, I think so. Luke I mean, I you know, one of the leaders at the moment have been reading the book, *The Reluctant Metropolis*. Right. To try and get an understanding, even though it's 20 years old, it still seems to be very sort of relevant to this day. And I think that if you look at the names on a lot of our buildings, right, those come from people that really created their wealth through promoting the growth machine. And it's the result of a lot of our problems today.

[00:14:50] Interesting. Joe Paterno, you said what I mean, how does Democratic politics, whether in forms of kind of community organizing or labor organizing, challenge money power challenge, that kind of connection between a certain kind of dominant forces of the economy and how they kind of capture political voice and capture political say? How does how does the innocence what is the role? Just expanding on what you both be talking about? What is the role of Democratic politics in this kind of small D sense in challenging that concentration of power?

[00:15:22] Maybe the best way to think about politics is to look at its root word about participation and for ordinary people to think that things are always done to them rather than with them or by them, so that they have a sense of urgency about what their community and what their lives look like. Well, that's why organizing tends to start smaller, maybe in neighborhoods, small victories such as the one I described in Houston. But then it can amplify to things where one can do something regionally around responding to pandemic health or the California network of organizations can do something very some very heavy lifting with us because people have the experience of gauging with one another. And we're immigrant families with Anglo families, with African-American families, understanding the need to have diverse allies who can haddrick. Together and have more success and can imagine exercising power in a larger way, but they've got to have a framework and a vehicle to make that happen, to make them important, to get them to the table so that, you know, local officials and the corporate community understands that this is a group that needs to be dealt with.

[00:16:37] So this is something they're about then if you have these concentrations of power at this connection of kind of economic concentrations, powers and how that builds in concentrated political power, there's a sense in which that is also, as we experience it around us today, it often atomizes or disaggregates or separates people. And so part of why that concentration of power is maintained is by kind of keeping people apart, whether through stories around kind of racial kind of divisions or competition stories, or you just got to kind of pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Just an individual uplift story. There are all these kinds of stories out there. Part of the work of organizing Democratic politics is to enable people to form coalitions and actually then come together to represent their shared interests and to fight for those together. And so that you kind of build it's about building that a kind of countervailing form of of agency and concentration of power that can challenge that money, power, concentration.

[00:17:47] Yes. And we need to realize is that requires time. But to build those types of relationships and that type of organization also requires some formation, building trust. Oftentimes, communities will say to us, we'd really like an IAF organization because we've got to deal with this big issue of this big corporate entity and said, well, it's going to take some time to form a sponsoring committee and to raise your money or create an institutional base, your leaders, so that we understand we're organizing this because we just don't work in the town and take on a set of issues. We're about creating a power base for the long term. But you do get there, you know, case in point, maybe what we recently did in Louisiana or we have taken on some titans such as Exxon Mobil, who were getting just unheard of tax breaks to the detriment of schoolchildren and public safety. What we've learned is that when you create a local power base, the people who understand effectively how to work with their local and state officials, but put some power through the vote and money that they raise and they understand that they're not going away, the whoever the corporate interests is, they're going to have to deal with them if they want to be there.

[00:19:08] So it's Janet, just an so to money. Obviously, we've been talking kind of negatively about the kind of concentrated money power. But money is a form of agency. It allows us to add to those obviously those engaged in democratic politics also need money if they're going to change the world for the better. And as as Joe mentioned before, organizing tends to talk about this in terms of organized people and organized money. Can you just expand a little bit about on that on that distinction and what's meant by this term organized money?

[00:19:41] So I think, you know, part of the leadership development that the IAF does so wonderfully right is really making you understand that without the ability to pay for your organizers, plain and simple, there is no organization. Right. There is no one else. If we do not have the money and so our organized money comes to the predominant amount, comes to our dues that all our member institutions pay. And then what we want to lay, I think that they call it different things across the country, but we call it our investment campaign, but which we do every year sort of in a very disciplined way by making this link between we want to pay for our organizers so that our organizers work for us. They don't work for a big corporation or a philanthropist or anything. And we obviously take no public money because we are completely nonpartisan. So that's a huge piece of sort of the leadership development is getting people comfortable with a how important the work is to them being able to articulate their own stories.

[00:20:51] I mean, the old phrase, who pays the piper? Unless you as communities are paying for the organizing work that's going on, someone else is paying for it and then they are answerable and then accountable to someone else, not to the local people in that

community. So that's that's a key way in which generating the money, generating the ability to act and the money that funds that is a key part of the organizing kind of work. So just just going back a little bit. Something you said before, Janet, about the role of sponsoring committees and getting fundraising for an organization. Can you just talk to us a little bit through that process, as you understand it? What is the sponsoring committee? How do you fundraise? How do you fundraise for and organize and some kind of examples of that process?

[00:21:41] So a sponsoring committee right before there is any IAF. So I don't have direct knowledge of that. I would be able to speak to that. But what one Alay has done very successfully is go back to the sort of sponsoring committee ethos, right. Where we've realized that very we need to be in an active recruitment that so all of our actions, we're always thinking of how can we expand our dues base? How can we expand our power by having more institutions at the table? And and, you know, it's very clear, like a sponsoring committee, if you don't get the money, there is not going to be an IAF. So if we don't get the money, there is not going to be one. So all the time when you get to being a sort of a senior leader, I don't know what they would do, but what they would call someone like me, that's very much what you're thinking about all the time, is not only the well-being of your own institution, 10 Polizei, but the well-being of one that becomes very, very important to you. So, you know, being able to see that by fixing the horrendous traffic situation outside 10 polizia on a very local micro level, I am building one alays power within 10 Polizei by showing this. So looking always right, negotiating people's interests, I think is is something that, you know and honestly, we I wouldn't this wouldn't be possible without the the investment of of your huge amounts of hours in training someone like me through the relationship with the IAF.

[00:23:29] Right to do. Just want to talk like when one's beginning and organizing initiative. You've talked a little bit just now about the process of, you know, you don't just hit the ground and start organizing. You have to build up the base and build up the institutions and coalition boards, the role of the sponsoring committee and kind of what relational work does it do in that initial formative stages?

[00:23:55] Well, it's the job of the sponsor community to birth the organization and to and we've learned this the hard knocks is that you want to put in place the foundation so that you can do the initial organizing and it can take several years. You know, typically we're invited in the community to come and visit because I like what they've seen in other areas. And we'll have two types of folks who will show up, those who want to jump right into issues which need addressing and those who understand the importance of cultivating the relationships, building an institutional base, putting together a budget and then hiring an organizer. I'm just finishing working with a group in western Colorado where we took the better part of four years doing this. And what we found is that those who wanted to get into the issues immediately, they began to fade away a bit. But we did find a group of leaders who were very interested in laying the foundation and were very interested in creating relationships between people who had never sat at the table together, very wealthy folks from the tourism industry with the undocumented folks way down valley who had actually, you know, the labor force who made that region go. And never before had they stuck together and getting to know one another in the trust. One another began to understand their issues on both sides of the table. You'll get the dispensing of stereotypes. You know, their faith institutions, non faith institutions, took some time to build those bridges because of mistrust and suspicion and then lots of training. And we made an agreement. We were going to raise three hundred and fifty thousand dollars before we got into issues. We went to twenty five institutions around the table. Then then we would launch and hire an

organizer and that set the foundation so that your organization doesn't have to come in and be your fundraiser or development director. There's a group of leaders who understand what we're trying to build and there's lots of ownership already because the organizations have set up a new structure. But these institutions have said that they're going to be part of this voices project.

[00:26:15] It's not just the raising of the money to the process of raising the. Money is also building the relationships and building the coalition and that the money is doing relational work in laying the foundations

[00:26:28] and most importantly, the ownership. Right, right. So this is the group that's going to set the direction of the organizing. This is the group that's going to hire the organizer. And this is the group that sees itself in relationship with the larger network of the Industrial Areas Foundation.

[00:26:43] What we've been talking about is raising money from dues paying institutions. And then but there is this distinction at work in organizing between hard money and soft money. Can you just outline what these terms mean and what's at stake in that distinction?

[00:27:00] So I think you alluded to it a little earlier, but basically hard money is money that we control. Right. That allows us to do the work that we think is important and to hire the organizers without any larger entity telling us what they think. So, for instance, right during covid, there was a lot of Kazakh money floating around. We did not apply for any of it because that would then mean that the supervisors or the county or the state board would basically be able to tell us what to do with that money, soft money that we obviously need. And we welcome it. If it's in alignment with our sort of our values and the work that we are doing on the ground. And that's soft money. So from philanthropists grant things like that, but that definitely has a puppet master, someone who would be taking the organizers time away from the institutions that make up one ally.

[00:28:00] I think I think Janet put it very well. I would even say that we would want to consider hard money and ownership money, but money that is locally raised, whether it be through the membership dues in the member institutions, whether it be from individuals or from a local corporate campaign that a lot of organizations spend time with. And that's not to say the grants are not important, but they should be complementary to the ownership money, they should not be driving the organization because usually there are stipulations and requirements and an organization needs to be much more nimble and driven by the leadership and not by outside funders. But again, the money oftentimes is very helpful and it allows us to do special projects, but we do not want to be approaching money raising his charity. We come with our own equity and we're asking others to also invest with us in a joint collaborative on what we're putting together.

[00:29:09] So there's something that I think very important about avoiding this kind of patron client relationships is very ancient, goes back to the Roman world and is often very tied into political power. You you know, I think we tend to think about it in those terms. But philanthropy, big foundations, in a sense, they they're wanting to act politically through those they're sponsoring and funding. And there's something there about actually having a more reciprocal relationship because you've got independence from the hard money and you're not entirely at the beck and call of or having to conform to stipulations and grant requirements from the soft money and that that allows for greater reciprocity. Is that something of what's going on there?

[00:29:57] Well, yes. And there have been times when we've said no to large grants because the requirements either were too onerous or would take us off of the work that we felt we needed to do locally. You know, normally we have good relationships with funders, but it can also be very seductive and can take your focus off of raising your hard money, your ownership money. And that needs to be a discipline that we want to continue to practice.

[00:30:24] So, Janet, one of one of the, I think, unusual things. I mean, there's various approaches and networks and kinds of organizing work out that the only interesting things about the IAF particularly is you can't join as an individual. You have to join as an institution. Can you just say a little bit about, you know, why not like the union have individual members paying dues? What why base it around institutions and what's what's going on there?

[00:30:53] Well, I think the most this was a really pivotal moment for me in my sort of development was when I realized that Janet Hirsch as an individual is I may get a few groupies, I may whatever, but I wouldn't have this institutional place behind me supporting the work that I do, helping me grow within me within 10 polizia. So first and foremost, we're not a group of individual actors. We're not sort of activists at all. Like we we organized through our institutions so that we have the sense of sort of shared ownership idea has a history we have when we above our arc is set up for justice. Just that I shall pursue. Right. So we have this moral imperative to act, which makes it easy for me to get to at least challenge the power structures that this is important work. This is something that we need to invest in. Right. As opposed to me just as an individual paying that which could know could be tempting at certain points in covid has not been easy on a lot of congregations, I think, of any denomination. So that institutional piece, the fact that we're with Temple Isaiah will be there without me, that the work will continue without me. Right. That there is this, but it also forces leaders to really think institutionally, to think about how are you making sure that Temple Isaiah thrives? How are you using the skills that you are learning through the IAF to make Isaiah a more relational place, a place that grows public leaders? One of the things I realized was that to be a good reform Jew is to be a political little person, right. To be able to really think politically, to think about people's interests, to navigate the power structures within. It became very apparent to me that if I wanted others to believe in this work, I needed to become much more central to temple. I had to join the board. I had to then become an and now the vice president of social justice. I have a budget. I negotiate the money around the Jews. The largest line item in my budget is the one I like Jews, but I now have the ability to go directly to people and say I want to increase our dues, which I have been able to do now for the last four years.

[00:33:21] So there's something there about the if it's just an individual actors joining. That there's this sense of by joining these institutions, it's a it's a shared agency, it's an institutional agency, it's a transgenerational agency, it's this much more expansive sense of who am I in relation to this group of people and how we collectively part of this then broader coalition rather than a bunch of atoms coming together at a fixed point. That's very that's very true. And just building on that then, I mean, you know, it sounds like there's always a kind of negotiation process of getting, you know, paying the Jews and keeping in membership. What in what in your experience are some of the the kind of questions that come up for institutions, for leaders in institutions or institutional leaders, come up about joining an organizing coalition and and particularly around, you know, because there is this ask like you've got to pay Jews an institution and money is always tight and there's always

issues around. What are some of the kind of questions that come up in your experience at that point and some of the kind of hesitations?

[00:34:31] I think the role of the organizing team is to minimize those questions as much as possible. Right. So if you are finding ways for everybody to have ownership and be proud, you know, whether that's putting an article in the newsletter like we did this week, listing all the people that have helped in whatever way, shape or form they helped in this vaccine clinic, a report to the board is done, you know, sort of three, three or four times a month meeting with the Budget Committee, understanding the finances of the temple. Right. Understanding that you in your you are almost responsible in a way for making sure that the money is there as well. Right. So what I was able to do right at the beginning was to help Isaiah think about what do we need to do in order to thrive? And they have a really great team of of clergy and whatever, but reaching out into the community at the beginning of Kovar to make sure that everyone felt taken care of, that we could understand that they needed to people needed to learn, zoom in order to stay. You know, that was something that one ally put together was a training, a civic academy, as we call to train people how to do that. And that we would also decide that this was really important to stay together and that money would not be the reason that you were no longer a member of Temple Isaiah, that we were going to meet you wherever you needed to be, has resulted in our ability to actually increase our dues during this time because we were able to really show the power of sort of this relational way of being. I always say that being part of Temple Isaiah Wright is not about having this is your community. You show up for people whether you like them or not, like it's not a prerequisite thing. It's a bit like your family. So and then it's much harder in other communities. But where there is a strong institutional leader and core team, it seems to be the value know. And also pointing out. Right, that our budget is a moral document. If we really you know, we spend a lot more on many, many other things, but I would posit are not as important as the ability to understand that piece. And to you know, one of which was hard for me is that I am supposed to link or justice work, that we do it, Isaiah, which is more than just want to lay to Torah. Right. To basically. And so as you become more confident in that path. Right. You have the ability to push back. You have the ability to say no. How come you are willing to spend X, Y, Z, and you're not willing to increase the demands for something that's so important.

[00:37:16] So that's a lovely line, though, about you say the budget is a moral document. It's a kind of ledger of what we invest, our time, energy, what we value. And it's a very good way of looking at institutional budgets and where they're investing, where where where is their heart invested, as it were. And it's a it's a kind of account of their Saijo attending to you. We've been talking about why membership

[00:37:41] in a coalition is institutional, not not individual. It strikes me that there's an insight in this practice about how without an institution, the individual is just acted upon by either the market or state forces and lacks the means to act with others to protect or pursue their interests. That they're I guess they're the individual worker being part of a union being being a case in point. But beyond the individual, by participating in a coalition of institutions, individual churches or other organizations in membership

[00:38:14] are able to move beyond a

[00:38:16] service model because the institution itself develops an expanded sense of its interests, of how it can only realize its mission in relationship with others and connected to the. Allative, where it's located in an understanding of the broader context through the

[00:38:31] organizing work, and my sense is that through this

[00:38:36] process and relationship building, each institution that is able to become more of what it's seeking to be able to kind of fulfill its mission better, as it always is.

[00:38:47] Is that right?

[00:38:48] That's right. How do you create a culture that incorporates individuals who are isolated into a larger body? And not just want to care for another, but also for formation so that people have a platform to enter public life?

[00:39:06] All right. So, Jenny, just tell the kind of the weeds a moment. I mean, how is you get a very compelling account there of your role in Arizona and how that connects to the to kind of raising the money for the membership dues to see the kind of very practical level. How have you taken some of the skills and practices you've learned through organizing and related them to fundraising, either in, you know, for the dues, but or more broadly, how you how you think about kind of raising money and fundraising and that relationship, some of the skills that you've learned through the training?

[00:39:43] Well, one of the most important things I learned, I think, was this concept of private versus public. Right. So I now have this ability to think of myself as a public leader as opposed to just a private individual, which means that my feelings don't get hurt quite. You know, I don't take no the same way as I would if it was just janitors as a person. So I think that that was really, really instrumental. And then, of course, the relational piece that you learn this ability to have real, curious, inquisitive conversations with people with no sort of ulterior motives but to be the one to one stuff. Yeah, the one you're exactly right where you're actually having a conversation with someone with you know, you're listening. You're curious about this other person. You want to figure out, is this someone you want to work with, is someone that you you're interested in and paying attention to a large group of people. And this is also a way that I'm pretty disciplined about it. I wasn't initially, but I am and having these one to one ongoing all the time and my urge to see it as a resource for them. So if there is someone that they are interested in, it's a very different relationship. You have with another congregant that you have with your rabbi to say they will share the name with me. And I then said this has been a way that I've been able to really pay attention to the preschool, to the religious school parents, to the empty nesters, all aspects, because congregations tend to be quite siloed. And relational organizing is a real way of breaking that down of thinking as a as the whole community. And I think that that's really helped me, just as I said, to exist in a more confident way than I would as just an individual.

[00:41:31] And that and that is it's driven by meaningful relationships that the that the ask for the money, the kind of question of what we're trying to do together and how the money is part of that bigger vision is itself birthed out of listening and relationship building. And so it's kind of grounded in the reality of where people are, what their actual stories are, how they what they cherish and love or passion or angry about. So there's a sense of it's actually rooted in people's

[00:42:04] lives and they have a sense of pride as well that they are helping this important work, that it's not just seen as, as Joe said before, charity. Right. You know, people who have witnessed my growth over the 12 years and seen how transformative it is. And then in the life of the temple, I think it then becomes much easier. But it's definitely that that

ability to think of yourself not just as an individual, but as part of this larger collective, the sort of sense of responsibility that I'm able to sort of convey, I think has really helped me the most fascinating.

[00:42:40] So we've been talking a lot about hard money, raising hard money from institutions, the role of institutions in it as members, and how the organized money circulates around that want to turn. Now to think a little bit more about the soft money side of the hard money, soft money distinction we mentioned earlier. So, Joe, kind of what is the role of philanthropy and foundations in organizing work? We touched on this a little bit beforehand, but obviously there's a big kind of concern more broadly, sometimes referred to as astroturfing, where, you know, philanthropists or foundations are kind of funding work in communities. But directing what goes on there. Can you just say. Say some kind of something about how you view that relationship with soft money. Some good examples of how that relationship goes and some bad examples of of whether where you think that kind of relationship goes goes wrong, as is it worth.

[00:43:40] There there are a number of foundations, a smaller number, who really want to invest in public life and the capacity of people develop their agency and of community organizing, and we value those and those grow out of trusted relationships. And quite frankly, there are even some individuals themselves who are willing to invest in that, primarily out of their dissatisfaction with the way political life has evolved or devolved or degenerated right now. There are a number of foundations who fund justice, work or who will be, and they'll have a focus on housing or immigration, health care. So there are elements of that that we can share in the work with them. What gets difficult is one, oftentimes we approach. And so you need to be part of such and such coalition. And here are the ground rules and the parameters for what you're going to do, because that's not joint ownership. That basically is renting an organization. And, you know, it's not about listening to what the leadership in the organization has learned of doing something in Colorado or in Texas is not the same as doing it in New York or California. And oftentimes there is there can be a top down mentality as well. So that's got to be negotiated. We you know, and sometimes philanthropy in this happens on both ends of the political spectrum is kind of multilayered in terms of trying to support one political perspective or another. So we're careful with that and we're very overt about being nonpartisan. And for us, sometimes we cheekily say that means that we're equally disrespect of respectful of both political parties. But we know that there are. Huge financial interests that can invest and whichever political party of whichever persuasion, and we just have to be clear about the interests of our families because the market, the market sector operates through much of philanthropy right now.

[00:46:02] So, yes, I mean, there's this kind of talk of philanthropy, capitalism. And we see, you know, it's been in the L.A. context, know, big single figures, made a lot of money in the Silicon Valley world, are coming in and wanting to kind of change public education. You know, they've got a vision how to how to how do you handle that? You know, how do you view that? I mean, I don't I don't know if you've if that's kind of impacted one L.A. at all. Some of the kind of more proactive titans of Silicon Valley study taking on some project. I think Zuckerberg had a big thing about academies and charter schools and stuff. I mean, does that shape the work that you have to respond to that kind of kind of proactive use of concentrated money, power now being directed towards the civic sector?

[00:46:56] Hugely in public education here. Right. We had Bloomberg putting huge amounts of money into our school board races. And one of the ways that we could organize around that is that while we don't endorse candidates, we do endorse people.

Well, we do show up in support of people who support our agenda around public schools. And we make it very clear to everyone that while we're not anti charter persay or any of these big initiatives, we are for real public education where every kid is taken care of, where, you know, my feeling was always, if the school is not good enough for my kid, then it shouldn't be good enough for anybody's kid. So making sure that we are very firm about what our interest is, but that is a huge part in in from my personal point of view, in not always. Helping public education in Los Angeles

[00:47:54] by marriage thing. I mean, what do you have reflections in that, Joe? Because that is an increasing piece of the money coming into political type organizing work outside of the party, political context. I mean, there is these very strong and we're talking huge amounts of of of money kind of coming in to certain specific campaigns. We've seen it around immigration reform and other areas. How how how to use and organize a handle that and think about that.

[00:48:25] Well, definitely you want to be in conversation with these folks, but a lot of that's money that we will not accept. And you're clear about what we think or most suspect of our efforts to diminish the public sector. Public education is a good example of, you know, when you bring in a market based strategy and there's going to be winners and losers and the part of the public sector is to be there for everyone and for the common good. And, you know, we find that particularly low income communities, people of color, immigrants oftentimes are on the losing end of that. And so that's one of the things that we're very careful about, is that, you know, who's going to benefit and who pays, because there is a there is a very predatory rent seeking type of agenda oftentimes. Not always, but not always. But that's one of the things that we're very aware of.

[00:49:22] And so that would be just concrete, that would be turning tax dollars and then directing it did something like privately owned schools rather than public schools. Said then that there are this people are making money, in a sense, taking kind of rent off the tax money, and that is directed out of public schools, into charter schools or academies or whatever. But that's someone else is profiting from that. And that we see that with private prisons, all sorts of use of government contracts to fund private initiatives rather than fund public services, which are kind of then don't genuinely serving all that money, going to serving the public good

[00:50:04] in private prisons. And I think the corporate charter school movement, what kind of example?

[00:50:08] And also I just wanted to jump in Luke and say that the one thing that also seems to happen with these big moneyed interest, right. Is that there's really no accountability. They have the money to totally, like, make something happen. And then if it doesn't happen, they just walk away. You know, he'll be damned to the poor kid that that was their one chance to go through school. And they were the one that was sort of experimented on for want of a better word, because there is no accountability and that that was a problem.

[00:50:38] And I think you raise a very important point there about how often these initiatives, whether from kind of philanthropy, capitalist or, you know, kind of privatization initiatives driven by kind of libertarian agenda. These are all whether progressive or right wing. These are all forms of Top-Down social engineering. They're not grounded in listening to people taking seriously the experience, the actual experience who sit on the other rand on the hard, sharp end of so many of these social policy changes and who who

actually have a wisdom born out of the real experiences they have about how to craft a policy which genuinely serves people's flourishing rather than fit some ideological agenda, whether of the left or the right, to kind of remake society in the image of an idea, rather than grounded in the practical realities of how people are making a life and what their kids needs are, what their family needs. And I think that's a we tend to think about this in these polarized ways. But as far as I can say that the use of money to drive, effectively walk are kind of highly technocratic. Social engineering projects is kind of anti-democratic. Whichever stripe of ideology is is driving that. It's a very key kind of problem.

[00:52:00] So and that money is very seductive and and it often masquerades as a civic sector initiative, but it really is the interests that are really very predatory, we think, to the public interest. And it varies state by state depending upon what's permitted and what's not. And so you'll see lots of experimentation, particularly with privatization occurring. And that's another reason why we think it's important that there be a lot of local knowledge and local strategies in addressing it, because a charter school in one state may be a very good thing, a very progressive and special needs children in a way that the public system can, in a way to challenge that system to change. And it is successful in it, but not in other states, just depending upon what. A framework has been set up for those entities to exist and to operate, and so that's why I think local knowledge is very important. We're not going to make a blanket accusation nationally, but this is happening in lots of places.

[00:53:03] And so it is that very much that practical reasoning, judgment of life for these people in this place at this time here, a charter school might be the best thing for this particular set of needs or in another context, but it's that broader context of power analysis that that operates.

[00:53:17] Yeah, well, making sure the people that are actually experiencing it have a decision and what's best for them. Right. They know best what's going to work for them. That obviously the IAF the word matters. Right, that lived experience and knowing that and learning to trust that we all have we all know what's going to work for our own individual communities.

[00:53:37] And the process of consultation, a genuine kind of rooted in listening to the people affected by the kind of democratic principle goes actually goes back to Roman law that that which affects or needs the consultation of all that. It's actually the origins of parliamentary democracy in Britain. You can see from the 17th century onwards. But but yeah. So just but I want to press a little bit into this question. You were saying, Joe, about the neutrality. So there is this emphasis on neutrality. But obviously, your you know, your you

[00:54:10] take outside nonpartizan

[00:54:13] nonpartizan. OK, so tell me through the difference between those two terms and in a highly polarized context, I was doing some work with the church here in North Carolina and they were just very basic. And this would be not organizing workers kind of service based work around providing welcome to the kind of emerging refugee community in Greensborough and the pastor of the church, you know, just wanted to do this. He thought, you know, there are neighbors. How do we reach out where there is kind of doing English as a teaching, English as a foreign language, the community or providing kind of care packages and stuff. And he was kind of shocked to realize to even talk about care for refugees in his congregation, to become highly polarized, that that, you know, that this had become some some of the most basic level of love your neighbor had had taken on this

highly polarized in some before and and others viewed this was a kind of Democrat issue. And why were we we shouldn't be caring for these kinds of people in that kind of highly polarized context and where you've got this kind of legal requirement to be nonpartizan from the kind of legal structure. What does that mean in reality is I mean, in a state like Texas, which has quite a divisive politics and the kinds of if you're working on an issue like immigration, aren't you inevitably seen as partizan? I mean, what does nonpartizan mean in our contemporary moment?

[00:55:35] Well, I would say that I think our fiercest critics are actually from the left on the right, and that's because there's a lost appreciation for the importance of institutions. And, you know, the tendency, I think, from both ends of the spectrum, so to speak, for change to happen very quickly without an appreciation that the situation around evolves over time. And it's going to take time to resolve. We were in a few of us were in a meeting a few years ago with a major foundation on the East Coast. And the question is, why aren't we doing more in a partizan nature? And the example of Texas was lifted up. They said if we were to be partizan in a state like that, then we would also be, in a sense, giving up protection for folks in the payday loan industry or we're victims of that because the payday loan industry writ large was actually putting together a coalition of Democrats to run their legislation.

[00:56:35] All right. Interesting.

[00:56:37] And so, you know, for us is a non-negotiable in terms of being nonpartisan in Arizona. Our sworn enemy on immigration was Governor Jan Brewer. But an important ally in Medicaid expansion was Governor Jan Brewer. So part of being nonpartisan is also recognizing that there are no permanent enemies and no permanent allies in public and political lives.

[00:57:04] I think that no permanent and no permanent enemies, no permanent allies thing. And then in allowing, as Diana said, this kind of Métis type judgments is very practical reasoning judgments is for this fight, this person we work with for this fight where we're facing.

[00:57:19] So I will make that point. So we would be nonpartisan, probably despite the need for what they are required. So.

[00:57:29] So you talk to me, Joe, about why businesses invest in and out fund organizing work. Can you just say a little bit more then about how that conversation goes and some of the things that kind of come up in that in those kinds of places? It's not always an inherently an oppositional relationship can be a cooperative and collegial relationship where there's shared interests and shared commitments. What kind of how do those emerge and what are you some reflections on how those conversations go?

[00:58:02] Well, these are some of the most political conversations we'll have in a community, because the business community, particularly if they're in the development community or the finance community or whatever the key industry is in the area are, they're the primary power movers. And when our leaders approach those meetings, we approach them as an action. You know, certainly we're asking them to invest in our work, but as a way of really gaining recognition for our efforts and investing in the relationship. And so we will plan those meetings in a way that we, you know, help them to understand what our investment has been in improving the community in the city, you know, asking them to continue to invest in our development information formation, more leaders in our

ability to expand and to do some of the heavy lifting that, you know, many times that they're not able to do because we would be able to leverage political officials in an important way. Sometimes they're pretty tense disagreements, but it is a way to be curious about them and what their interests are, where they see things look in the next five, 10 or 15 years.

[00:59:14] Can you say a little bit about just as an example of a kind of ongoing form of that relationship? A little bit about Project Quest. And there we see that interaction between community organizing and the and the kind of market sector collaborating to kind of generate good in a community

[00:59:33] or project questions. Are labor market a strategy that's call a job training effort in San Antonio, which is twenty five years old. It's arguably one of the strongest workforce training programs in the country would boost wages from a minimum wage to close to twenty five dollars an hour, starting wages, and has become an integral piece of the economic development strategy for the community of San Antonio.

[00:59:59] Fantastic to. So just amazing. Joe, thank you so much for joining me on the and organize. That podcast has been a great conversation and I think opened out this whole question of money, hard money, soft money, how we think constructively about it and how we change our communities through constructive use of money and resisting the kind of dominance of money power in shaping our life together. So really, thank you for this time.

[01:00:23] Thanks for having us.

[01:00:34] Thank you for joining me on this,

[01:00:36] the Listen Organize Act podcast in which I discuss the relationship between money, politics and organizing. This is the first of two episodes where I'll discuss this relationship in the next episode. I continue this reflection by discussing how we can make money, do creative work in our communities through creating different kinds of institutions, and I'll explore a more expansive vision of the economic dimensions of democracy. The podcast itself is a collaboration between the Industrial Areas Foundation and the Keenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University. And as with other episodes, there'll be suggestions for further reading, which you can download in the show notes on the website. That's [ormondcenter.com backslash listen-organize-act-podcast](http://ormondcenter.com/backslash/listen-organize-act-podcast). Do sign up at the website for news about events and resources related to the podcast or to send me questions. But I'll have to say goodbye and I hope you join me next time.