

Markets and Politics in Urban Recycling: A Tale of Two Cities

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Abstract

Much contemporary environmental policymaking shifts our political focus away from our ecological goals, stressing instead the need to create "economically efficient" means to accomplish these goals. Social scientists have paid limited attention to the social distributive outcomes of such policymaking. Yet these outcomes of heightening attention to economic efficiencies affect the scale and intensity of political constituencies for environmental protection.

In this *Tale Of Two Cities*, we trace this process of "markets over politics" and its impacts in the United States, Chicago, and its northern suburb of Evanston, Illinois, in the 1990s. Both cities constructed and implemented curbside recycling programs during this period. But the rationale, goals, and means of recycling were dramatically different in the two municipalities.

Although both communities recruited unskilled labor for the actual sorting jobs, the Chicago facility initially offered a repressive and regressive mode of labor control, essentially reducing low-income workers to a day-labor contingent worker status. Recyclable diversion rates were extremely low for the wide diversity of materials collected. In contrast, Evanston offered both life-skills training to its workers, and assistance in getting employment at the end of their recycling jobs. Their recyclable diversion rates were quite high for the restricted materials they selected. Paradoxically, the political administration of Chicago eventually intervened to improve both work conditions and recyclable diversion rates. But the budgetary politics in the City of Evanston led to an abandonment of that municipality's unique recycling program, and a contracting out of the work to the private sector.

We also explore the factors that led each community's decision-makers to select and modify their technologies of curbside recycling: capital-intensive in the case of Chicago, and labor-intensive in the case of Evanston, and their quite different managerial agendas. These differences and dynamics suggest the value of studying how political involvement in the environmental policymaking process can alter the balance between politics and markets in environmental protection.

A. *SOCIAL VERSUS. ECONOMIC FRAMINGS OF RECYCLING*

1. MOBILIZING and DEMOBILIZING ECONOMIC and SOCIAL DISCONTENTMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL REFORMS

With the cost of environmental protection on the rise, political agencies are urged to find economically efficient ways of reducing some aspects of ecosystem withdrawals or additions. To some extent, we know that this can limit their benign ecological outcomes. But environmental policies and programs often ignore their social distributive effects. We argue here that environmental protection policies can move in more progressive or more regressive directions, shifts that are driven by both politics and markets. We illustrate these arguments by presenting data on community-based policymaking about local solid waste recycling.

Progressive distribution of social rewards can help environmental movements and agencies politicize previously unmobilized groups. Progressive policies can help socialize citizen-workers by more overtly politicizing the existing maldistribution of both natural amenities and socioeconomic achievements. Such community-based policies can respond to growing complaints about widening social inequalities in access to resources, on the one hand (Schnaiberg and Gould 1994), and in exposure to environmental hazards (i.e., increased environmental injustices), on the other (Bullard 1990, 1993; Bryant and Mohai 1992). Conversely, more regressive environmental policies that stress market factors and economic efficiency can exacerbate social inequalities. They also suppress political reactions in local political agendas by treating social inequity as a non-issue (Bachrach and Baratz 1963).

To illuminate these processes, we focus on a growing mode of environmental control, the recycling of waste materials. By presenting "a tale of two cities" in the United States, we note how materials recycling emerged in one place in a socially progressive form, and in another locale in a socially regressive form. In the first city, Evanston, Illinois, the local policy initially integrated social distributional concerns with market concerns. This confirmed the prospects of environmental policies to achieve social as well as environmental goals within an economically viable framework. But Chicago, the second city, enacted policies that prioritized economic efficiency over environmental protection. This policy worsened social inequalities, and fell short of producing serious ecological protection. Social and political resistance to Chicago's regressive and ecologically inefficient program eventually led to the city's melioration of the program. Conversely, the rise of budgetary concerns and the absence of an activated local political constituency for recycling led to the abandonment of Evanston's **unique program**.

Local social and economic discontentment that may be reduced or exacerbated by recycling policies include:

- a. racial/ethnic group and working class resentment of landfills and incinerators;
- b. environmental justice movement against these locally-unwanted-land-uses (LULUs) in people of color and/or low-income communities;
- c. strained municipal budgets inadequate to control growing waste streams, leading to rising local property taxes, higher landfill user fees, and/or lowering waste collection services;
- d. managerial and investor resistance to tight control over producer waste-generation by direct state regulation;
- e. downsizing and redirection of investment out of inner cities and poorer communities, creating growing unemployment and wage declines;
- f. declining potential of many working and middle-class families to engage in flight from blighted communities rather than "fight", because of (e).

Recycling presents an interesting environmental policy case, since much of the structure of the contemporary recycling policy apparatus has been built in the past two decades. It is during this time that social inequalities have been widening in many industrial societies. While the degrees to which such inequalities have been the source of political mobilization "from below" have been quite variable within and across these societies, the potential for such collective behavior is present in many communities. This potential can be tapped by social movements or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), on the one hand, and attenuated or aggravated by governmental and corporate policies, on the other.

In many ways, the case of post-consumer recycling illustrates, albeit in a different historical and social context, Hugh Stretton's (1976) earlier classification of forms of political mobilization arising from environmental challenges. Stretton outlined sociopolitical scenarios during the era of energy crises that were non-distributive ("business as usual"), regressive ("the rich rob the poor"), and progressive ("troubles" and "second chances"). His work in the 1970s, stimulated by the energy crises, and our recycling examples in the 1990s, stimulated by the so-called "landfill crisis," both alert us to the variable forms of social distribution and political mobilization that can arise from environmental protection policies in any industrial society and community.

2. THE PITFALLS OF ENVIRONMENTAL REFORMS WITHIN THE TREADMILL OF PRODUCTION

We view the dominant political and economic system of industrial societies as a "treadmill of production" (Schnaiberg 1980b; Schnaiberg and Gould 1994; Gould et al. 1996; Weinberg 1997a, 1997b; Pellow forthcoming). The concept of the treadmill visualizes a political-economy driven by several core factors.

First, there is a social and political assumption of the need to continuously expand industrial production and economic development. Economic expansion is generally viewed as the core of any viable social, economic, or environmental program. Economic expansion is thought to increase the profits that corporate managers and their investors require for capital outlays. Workers benefit from these outlays because they lead to increased production, which creates new local employment opportunities both in direct industrial production and, more indirectly, in the construction and service sectors. The service sector is thought to grow most rapidly due to the economic multiplier of having more workers with higher wages living and spending within a community. Capital outlays also lead to higher levels of productivity — a precondition for rising wages. Finally, local and national governments view economic expansion as increasing the taxation capacity of the government, allowing it to distribute compensatory benefits to displaced workers and dependent citizens. Governments believe that tax revenues rise more rapidly than citizen demands, and thus government officials and agencies increasingly share a stake in the economic expansion of the private sector (Schnaiberg and Gould, 1994; Smith and Feagin, 1987; Logan and Swanstrom, 1990).

Second, the treadmill is structured by the need to ensure that consumption keeps pace with production. If economic growth comes about through increased production of goods, consumers have to have the disposable income to purchase the goods. The state works with private capital to make low interest loans available to consumers for the purchase of homes and other items. In the United States we have seen 20 years of state/private deregulation making credit cards and mortgage loans easier to obtain.

Third, there exists the sociopolitical belief that social and ecological problems are best solved by ratcheting up the treadmill's pace. Social problems are generally thought to be best solved "through the market." Thus, there is a magical sense that any type of economic expansion will reduce social and ecological problems. Poverty will be reduced by a growing economy, because there is an expanded job base and an increase in wages. A growing economy also supports government social expenditures (for education, housing, and other needs of the poor to achieve upward mobility).

Fourth, economic growth is tied to a commitment to an expansion of corporate-centered development. In this model, nation-states and cities prioritize the needs of private capital over the needs of the state itself and its constituent citizen-workers. Economic expansion can only be fostered through the growth of large firms — what are often referred to as "core firms." Large firms are thought to be the engine of the economy. Their growth creates the most demand for jobs, and it creates secondary demand for supplies, which fuel the growth of smaller entrepreneurial firms. The wages paid to the large labor pools provide consumption needs in the stores that keep local merchants in business (Reich, 1992).

Fifth, and finally, all of these elements of sociopolitical belief are reinforced by substantial economic and political socialization efforts on the part of core firms and their dependent institutions (trade associations, advertising, educational efforts in promoting "free trade", etc.). What has resulted until recently in industrial societies is an enduring political alliance of private capital, trade associations, and governments to promote these goals.

Although there exists a substantial literature on the degrees and types of "corporatist" or "non-corporatist" forms of industrial states (Schmitter and Lehbruch, 1982), it is our assessment that virtually all industrial states have evolved into a common commitment to the types of growth policies that characterize the treadmill of production. Moreover, with growing transnational investments, there appears to be an intensification of such commitments, as capital and employment flow from more industrial societies of the North into the emergent economies from the South. In general, it appears that the United States is the most extreme advocate for transnational contraction of both economic safety nets (Greider, 1997, Harrison, 1994, Longworth, 1996, 1998), and limits on economic expansion, as in its rejection of the Kyoto agreement on reducing global warming gases.

Goodman and Redclift (1991:17) remind us of the socially regressive biases of the treadmill of production when they assert that "the share of resources which individuals (and governments) receive is linked to the way that these resources are used." Effective citizenship practices, which are implied by theories of a socially progressive and ecologically stable future of sustainable development, thus require changes in the basic forces and relations of production (Gould, 1993). The progressive potential in environmental reforms such as recycling are, therefore, only attainable and sustainable with an enduring level of political tension and frequently overt conflict (Stretton, 1976; Redclift, 1984; Schnaiberg, 1994; Redclift, 1987). Citizen behaviors will, across time and space, reflect their different roles as family members, workers, and variably-politically mobilized players in a sometimes conflictual discourse about socioeconomic development and environmental protection. In this paper, we suggest ways in which local state actions can enhance or retard this discourse, and the subsequent social outcomes of community policies.

3. WHY RECYCLING "WON SUPPORT" WITHIN THE TREADMILL OF PRODUCTION

1. Waste Production and Waste Disposal: From Solution to Problem

Recycling policies emerged in an historical context in which the treadmill of production has increased its dependency upon discarding most producer and post-consumer wastes. Such actions stimulate demand for new disposable products and also reduce some labor costs of production and distribution by using machine packaging and disposability. Incineration, landfilling, and other modes necessary to deal with growing waste volumes have produced growing ecological additions of water and air pollution, and taken productive land out of alternative uses.

In turn, these outcomes have diminished the use values of local ecosystem resources for local community groups, some of whom have become mobilized in opposition to this process. During the conservative U.S. presidential administrations of the 1980s, dominant capital interests in the United States were able to place market or exchange value considerations uppermost on the political agenda (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962, 1963, 1973; Grieder, 1992; Philips, 1989). U.S. producers operated in a world system that stressed growing competitiveness, which required shifting capital and natural resource inflows into production (Lipietz, 1987; O'Connor, 1988). Both the Reagan and Bush administrations in the United States helped producers compete by allowing them to externalize costs, thereby deflecting the focus of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) of 1976. RCRA initially stressed source reduction and recycling within the production process, which congressional Republicans and many industry sectors viewed as too costly. Instead, political and economic elites substituted policies for improved disposal of industrial wastes, through landfills and incinerators, which they saw as less costly.

The call from the administration and core producers for more landfills and incinerators was met with hostility from local communities. To some extent, communities' concerns stemmed from the accumulation of pollution from existing landfills, and the subsequent heightening of social consciousness about toxic waste pollution. National publicity about toxic hazards at Love Canal and other sites increased such local concerns (Szasz, 1994; Brown and Mikkelsen, 1990; Schnaiberg, 1992a). From this rising concern with toxic industrial wastes, local communities formed citizen-worker opposition groups that joined forces with environmental organizations to oppose virtually all landfills and incinerators. These efforts gave rise to the Environmental Justice and the Anti-Toxics movements.

As these movements spread, a "landfill crisis" emerged. Existing landfills were "filling up" (e.g., Papajohn, 1987; Tackett, 1987; Bukro, 1989). And local neighborhood organizations were able to stop the construction of new landfills and the expansion of existing ones. Likewise, they

were able to channel protests and concerns toward local governments, which controlled some portion of the land used for landfills, incinerators, and other alternatives to recycling (Schnaiberg, 1992a). Consequently, local governments became focal points and mediators of these conflicts. Their response to these pressures varied widely. Local governments were split between supporting citizen constituencies, and dominant economic interests that support the state and its transfer payments to constituents (Schnaiberg, 1994).

Despite the ambivalence to act, municipalities had to do something. First, they feared that local citizen-worker constituents would withdraw political support for those administrations that failed to adopt some type of palatable policy. Second, the Reagan-Bush administrations practiced "devolution" or *subsidiarity*, shifting responsibility to the regional, state, and local arenas, though often without concomitant resources to carry out these missions. Third, industrial producers were placing pressure on local and other governments (Lowi, 1979) to maintain "cost-effective" waste disposal, in order to contain corporate costs in a time of increased world-systemic competitive pressures (Szasz, 1994; Blumberg, 1980).

Even so, local governments were confused as to how to proceed. Almost any local "solution" would likely increase costs for the economic actors involved with generating consumer goods. These solutions were politically unfeasible, as they would alienate powerful allies (such as business investors who might seek profits elsewhere), shrink the tax base (as profits decreased), and lead to a loss of jobs (again, as profits decreased). Likewise, landfills (like littering of bottles, cans, and paper), had high social visibility (Schnaiberg, 1993). Local governments knew that anything with high visibility was likely to produce local resistance. Local government and industrial leaders managed these tensions by borrowing an old concept from a long-standing and successful campaign of the trade associations of disposable container manufacturers. They formed a not-for-profit organization in the 1950s — Keep America Beautiful, Incorporated — that remains active today in supporting recycling. It recruited support from other "public interest" groups, by using the corporate social strategy of keeping disposed containers "out of sight, out of mind" (Szasz, 1994). Initially the focus was on anti-litter campaigns. In recent years, the anti-litter message has been supplemented with new support for recycling. Garbage, landfills, and "resource conservation" issues all merged in the new local program of "curbside recycling."

2. Materially "Closing the Loop" by 'Squaring the Economic Circle'

Recycling became socially constructed as the "magic bullet" that would solve the "landfill crisis" (Gutin, 1992). Recycling was touted as reducing local waste disposal costs, allowing communities to recapture some exchange value of this waste as these materials were sold to private sector organizations that would remanufacture new goods from these wastes. Recycling

would be the first stage in recovering wastes for a more market-driven strategy than was the case for landfills or incinerators. In the latter, municipalities paid contractors to somehow move wastes "out of sight."

The rhetoric of recycling, dominated by the economic ideologies of Reaganism, was that recycling would be "cost-effective" or "profitable" for everyone — a utopian solution to the waste problem. Local governments would sell their curbside-collected wastes to recyclers, thereby making money instead of spending money on waste disposal. Not only would local citizens have fewer pollution problems as landfills somehow became less prevalent in the local ecosystem, but they would also be rewarded by lower tax bills for waste disposal. All of this would stimulate the treadmill while pleasing environmentalists, for wastes would be recycled instead of dumped into local land and water ecosystems.

3. The Role of Local Environmentalists

Another important chapter of this history is the connection between the environmental movement's opposition to landfills and incinerators and these groups' support for recycling as an alternative. Paraphrasing the popular slogan of the anti-drug campaign during the 1980s and 1990s, environmentalists urged citizens to "just say no" to landfills and incinerators and to "say yes" to recycling. A popular t-shirt many activists wore during this time read, "God Recycles, the Devil Burns." In fact, the decision to initiate the City of Chicago's Blue Bag program was largely attributable to the local environmental movement's successful campaign to shut down the city's Northwest Incinerator and adopt more aggressive recycling policies.

4. The Non-Zero Sum Appeal of Postconsumer Recycling

What made this "new" form of waste handling socially and politically feasible was that, on the surface, post-consumer recycling represented a non-zero sum game. Indeed, according to some early proponents (and contemporary advocates), post-consumer recycling was a form of social alchemy. Since most communities wanted to "get rid of" wastes, these wastes had no apparent social value. They were devalued non-commodities (a synonym of "waste"). These non-commodities could now be socially and materially transformed into new commodities — those with potential use-value in economic markets. Moreover, by doing so, communities would lower the cost of landfills, incinerators, and other waste disposal facilities that required large public sector outlays. Finally, since these new recycled-based commodities could be marketed, the remanufacturing agents could now afford to pay communities something for the previously valueless waste products.

An alternative, but related, path prevailed in lower income communities in the United States, European and Third World societies. In the United States, the range of reuse activities includes what we might call social reuse: activities that are more oriented toward consumer use values. Included are garage sales (run by individuals), rummage sales (run by churches and other nonprofit organizations), and thrift stores (run for profit or by nonprofit service organizations). A recent innovation has been the recycling of prepared food from restaurants and caterers, which often allows the poor to "eat cake," using voluntary donations to facilitate the transport of prepared food to needy consumers. For most of these activities, prices are set by the consumers' capacity to pay, and the use value of the goods to consumers. Even here, though, while the commodification process is attenuated, the fact remains that "discarded" goods are transformed into "useful" goods. As with recycling, a negative waste stream is converted into a positive use-value reproduction scheme.

There was a third mode of market reuse of consumer and producer cast-off goods that involved price-setting based on more exchange-value considerations of the sellers. Included are traditional antique dealers and newer antique malls, conducted house sales, and some used appliance, furniture and automobile agencies (including sales of previously rented goods). More recent examples are new forms of construction-waste recycling in which timber, concrete, and other materials, which had previously been dumped into landfills or incinerated, are now sold for new forms of construction and landscaping. Many of these materials are being reused by more complex organizations that are being designed to apply the principles of sustainable development and "green design" to poor neighborhoods in urban areas.

4. DISTRIBUTIVE CONFLICTS REDISCOVERED: NEW ZERO-SUM DIMENSIONS

Within a very short time, the political and social model above was challenged. What appeared to be non-zero sum aspects of post-consumer waste recycling were somewhat illusory. We can enumerate these into four categories:

- (a) diminished returns for waste-disposal organizations;
- (b) new outlays for recycling;
- (c) diminished markets for "virgin" materials; and
- (d) growing disillusionment with recycling.

a. Diminished returns for waste-disposal organizations

Because recycling is designed to divert the flow of waste streams, those whose business involved waste handling and disposal were initially affected. Everything from underutilized vehicles previously used for transporting garbage to commercial (and public) landfills and incinerators were challenged by the potential and actual rise of recycling. One response of these organizations (public and private) was to become partly transformed into recycling agencies. New trucks that would be designed for garbage were redesigned to collect recyclable materials — or in Chicago, new containers for recyclables ("blue bags") were simply added to the regular pickups of city sanitation crews/trucks. Landfill tipping costs were often also raised (along with incineration costs), ostensibly to reduce the incentive to landfill or incinerate rather than recycling. But a cynical observer might also note that such increased user fees would also compensate for revenue decreased by diversion of waste materials.

b. New outlays for recycling

Post-consumer waste required collection of discarded consumer wastes. It soon became apparent that many for-profit waste-handling firms (and some public sanitation agencies) were required to expend much more on labor and vehicles to collect diffused post-consumer wastes. Most post-consumer waste collecting groups intended to sell the wastes to market-based firms for remanufacturing. The latter decided early on in the process that in order to make profits, they could only accept "clean" batches of recyclable materials — i.e., wastes sorted into forms that would readily be accommodated into manufacturing processes, with minimum new capital outlays. Ideally, these remanufacturers wanted materials to be similar to post-producer wastes, which were already being recycled in their origin plants. For example: there are hundreds of grades of paper. Depending on the end markets, the paper needs to be sorted into several different batches of similar grade material. So, in effect, "recyclables" had to become transformed into something approximating "industrial scrap."

Private sector remanufacturers ensure profits from efficiencies in manufacturing, and usually keep their raw materials costs to a minimum. They merely applied these criteria to new "remanufacturable" raw materials, known as "recyclables." In order to meet these standards, new facilities were needed in communities — to collect, store, and sort the potentially remanufacturable waste goods they collected. Private waste-handling organizations, and some community-based ones, quickly discovered that there were high costs and low returns for these new activities, often focused around Materials Recovery Facilities (MRFs). They thus retreated from this part of the activity, leaving communities to build or contract for new MRFs, thereby

allowing private waste haulers to profit by collecting recyclables, and private remanufacturers to profit by incorporating pre-sorted ready-to-remanufacture recyclable materials. The middle part of the process — intensive, dirty, and expensive labor — was left for the public sector to support.

c. Diminished markets for virgin materials

A newer form of challenge to the non-zero sum game of recycling is slowly emerging only after substantial recycling-remanufacturing has been rising. Remanufactured materials using recyclable inputs would lower the need for virgin materials, thereby altering both the profits and employment possibilities of the latter industries. Thus primary product producers would find their markets attenuated. Not surprisingly, then, there has been considerable resistance by primary producers to recycling.

d. Rising disillusionment with recycling

Discontent with state costs for recycling is rising. This has been particularly acerbic in an era of recession and state indebtedness. Critics (Schneider, 1991, Swanson, 1991a) have noted that municipal costs of recycling exceed revenues from remanufacturers. One logical approach would call for higher fees from remanufacturers (an exchange-value orientation). Another approach would reason that the negative environmental externalities justify these net costs (a use-value orientation: e.g., van Vliet, 1990, pp. 32-33). But the most frequent argument is that this "unprofitability" of waste collection calls into question the social value of waste collection programs. These critics suggest scaling down the scope and intensity of collections. A *New York Times* (1991) editorial put this argument most directly near the start of the 1990s — the "recycling decade":

"Recycling is obviously a laudable goal. It conserves materials at little cost to the environment. But until recycling generates its own revenues, the increased expenses of collection, like rising landfill costs, will have to be paid by cutting other city programs. [The Sanitation Commissioner] is right to go slowly."

More recently, a *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* article echoed these sentiments:

"To help get local recycling programs off the ground, the state began giving municipalities and counties recycling grants funded with a surcharge on businesses that was supposed to have been temporary. Eventually, enough strong markets would be developed for recycled materials that recycling would

pay for itself — or even become a moneymaker for municipalities....That never happened." (Rinard and Sandin 2001)

This response suggests that recycling has been significantly transformed from its ideological origins in the environmental movement. Essentially, the media comments above reflect the dominance of exchange values, and the concomitant decline of earlier use value arguments such as those of environmental movements. Once again, market criteria dominate political decisions about waste processes (Lindblom, 1977; Young, 1991; Swanson, 1991b). From this position, only those elements of solid waste that generate profits should be recycled. The rest should be disposed of in other "more economic" ways. If landfills are too politically risky, then perhaps incineration or shipment abroad should be tried. Environmental and local citizen-worker groups who promote recycling are thus at risk of supporting an ecologically flawed policy, and one that will achieve few progressive social ends, as we note below.

B. A SOCIAL HISTORY OF RECYCLING IN THE CHICAGO REGION

5. CASE #1: THE TREADMILL OF PRODUCTION AND THE BLUE BAGS OF CHICAGO

Imagine the following: (reconstructed from an interview):

It is 7 a.m. in the morning. You are a black women, standing in a huge facility (400 yards long) It's freezing cold because there is no heating system. You have just walked 1.5 miles because the facility is not accessible by public transportation and you are too poor to own a car. You are going to spend the next 10-12 hours (often you do not know how long) standing on an assembly line sorting through raw garbage straight from garbage cans. You may or may not have protective gloves, so you will have to be careful. Coming down the line could be: hypodermic needles, dead animals, live rats, broken glass, and on the odd day a baby or other human body parts. You have seen co-workers splattered with battery acid and picking up leaking bags marked: "biohazard." To quote one of your co-workers: "I can't remember the first guy who got stuck by a needle... The guy got stuck by a bloody needle. You don't know whose needle that was. Hopefully, he didn't get inflected with HIV, or Hepatitis A or B...." This worker goes on to tell us that this man was lucky because one of his co-workers picked up a bag of asbestos that came down the line. For this you will be paid \$6 an hour, and guaranteed employment for 89 days, at which time you will be fired one day before the 90 days needed for unionization and other benefits to start.

— — WELCOME TO CHICAGO'S BLUE BAG PROGRAM

1. Why the City of Chicago Developed A Municipal-Based Recycling Program

In the late 1980s, the City of Chicago embarked upon a large-scale municipal recycling program that made it virtually impossible for the city's nonprofit recycling centers to stay open. The city developed a recycling program for the usual reasons. A 1984 moratorium on the expansion and siting of new landfills precipitated a crisis that forced the administration to think about future waste disposal plans. Siting an incinerator in the city was therefore no longer possible. Siting a new landfill appeared to be equally impossible. Much of the city's large white, liberal elite supported environmental protection issues. Recycling seemed to be one of those rare win-win policies for the city. It would solve the landfill problem, please the environmental community, and perhaps provide jobs in some of the city's depressed areas.

In 1990, the City of Chicago announced a Request For Proposals (RFP) for developing a comprehensive, citywide, residential recycling program. The city closed the door on bids for separate neighborhoods of Chicago, thereby shutting out existing community development organizations. The executive director of the Chicago Recycling Coalition called the RFP process an example of "bald-faced power playing by a corporation with a monopoly," suggesting that the RFP was written with the locally headquartered multinational Waste Management Corporation in mind. Her charge stems from her observations that: (1) Waste Management was headquartered in the Chicago metropolitan area and plays an influential role in local politics; (2) the brother of Chicago's mayor was on the Board of Directors of a Waste Management subsidiary, Wheelabrator Technologies and, (3) Wheelabrator's Northwest Incinerator in Chicago was shut down in April of 1996, necessitating a compensatory waste-management system. This was a tailor-made request for Waste Management,. This firm has faced many lawsuits charging bribery, death threats to politicians, illegal dumping and environmental racism (Rachel's Environment and Health Weekly, July 24, 1997).

The Chicago plan was to adopt what became known as the "Blue Bag" approach to recycling. While many curbside recycling programs are characterized by source-separated recyclables put into bins for pickup by recycling (not municipal waste) trucks, this program was different. Through the Blue Bag program, residents placed their recyclables in blue plastic bags, which were then collected along with garbage in regular garbage trucks. The trucks dumped their loads at what the City called Material Recycling and Recovery Facilities (MRRFs), where the bags were pulled out of the garbage and their contents separated. Recyclable materials not in bags were also be pulled out of the garbage for processing.

To the city, the Blue Bag program seemed like a great opportunity. The mayor's office had originally been responding to a number of legal and political economic realities, including: a

case being considered by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in which it was later ruled that Chicago's incinerator ash constituted hazardous waste. This meant that the tons of waste produced every day at Chicago's Northwest Incinerator (the city's principal waste-management system since 1971) were now subject to regulation under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), and hence expensive to dispose of. The city was therefore in violation of this law because, by burying the ash in landfills, it was not properly disposing of these materials. In addition, Illinois law requires that Chicago have a recycling plan that would achieve a 15 percent recycling rate by 1994 and 25 percent by 1996. Chicago's recycling ordinance (pushed by the Chicago Recycling Coalition and Citizens for a Better Environment) required that by 1993 all low-density dwellings have "regular recycling service," defined as the collection of at least four types of materials. In later interviews, we discovered that the actual roots of the blue bag program lay in the city's quest for a new solid-waste management system, after the shutdown of existing incinerators. Recycling was only a small component of total solid waste, and thus many of the later problems of recycling reflect the rather limited attention given to recycling, as opposed to broader programs for solid-waste *management*.

The city was also eager to explore the prospect of new recycling centers in a city facing a continuous exodus of jobs for its working-class residents. Since the 1970s, factories and neighborhoods in Chicago have experienced large scale "deindustrialization" (Bluestone and Harrison 1982) and white flight, leaving the urban core "hollowed out." In the 15-year period from 1947 to 1963, Chicago's manufacturing jobs declined by 18% (122,000 jobs). There was a small gain between 1963 and 1967, but in the next 15-year period, from 1967 to 1982, the decline accelerated and amounted to 46%, which translates into roughly 250,000 jobs. William Wilson (1996:29-30) noted an accelerating decline as well. He found that by 1987, Chicago lost 326,000 or 60% of its manufacturing jobs over this 20-year period.

The four new MRRFs were slated to create anywhere from 50-100 jobs each, with a total of 200-400. This seemed especially advantageous given that a post-consumer solid-waste management infrastructure was already in place, with Waste Management already providing waste pickup service using a fleet of trucks and several transfer stations and landfills. The Blue Bag program would fit right into this structure with no major changes. Finally, after conducting a cost-benefit analysis, the city concluded that a privately run program was most cost effective. Total annual costs for the public-private joint program were projected to be \$31 million for a privately run curbside-collection program versus the \$41 million a publicly financed curbside program would cost (not including the 210 new trucks that would be needed). Thus, casting aside both ecological and social criteria in this small component of Chicago's solid-waste management plan, "the primary reason given for adopting the commingled bag/MRRF recycling program is its

affordability" (Solid Waste Management Newsletter 1990). To quote a Waste Management manager:

"In 1991 the City went out to look and see how should we recycle, and one of the things that they saw is that a lot of places have curbside programs and they looked at the cost of that. The cost — because you end up sending two trucks down an alley...was... prohibitive. So they looked at the Blue Bag program."

2. How the Blue Bag Program Was Destructive for the City of Chicago

All of the above reasons would seem to support the city's position that Blue Bag recycling in Chicago would be a perfectly rational and efficient solution to a variety of economic, ecological, and political problems. Since the first week the Blue Bag went on-line, it became increasingly apparent that the city miscalculated the effects of the program.

Miscalculation #1: The Start-Up Costs

The first miscalculation was that the cost of building and operating the MRFs turned out to be much more expensive than originally calculated. While Waste Management designed, constructed, equipped, and operated the facilities, the City of Chicago compensated the company for its costs and services. Originally, these costs were anticipated to be a capital burden payment of between \$5 and \$8 million for building each of the facilities (Solid Waste Management Newsletter 1990). The actual costs turned out to be closer to \$15 million each. Thus, the city underestimated this figure by as much as \$40 million dollars. Also, the city agreed to compensate the contractor for hauling and/or disposing of non-recycled refuse to either sanitary landfills or to the city-operated Northwest Incinerator. This turned out to be expensive because recovery rates have been low, thus requiring larger loads of materials to be sent to landfills. Waste Management, however, retained all revenues derived from the sale of recycled materials. Here too the costs were seriously underestimated.

Waste Management and the City of Chicago had no shortage of critics. One Chicago Recycling Coalition (CRC) leader noted:

"there was a deal made behind closed doors — that this would be the new program. It's easy to see how this happened, in a sense. They also have a close relationship with the Daley family. Mayor Daley's brother sits on the board of Wheelabrator Technologies, which is a subsidiary of Waste Management. He receives a fairly hefty \$40,000 a year stipend for doing basically nothing. And you know, Waste Management has been sponsoring a lot of city-greening activities and things of that nature. I think the most

telling thing about the relationship between the city and Waste Management was that... the city chose this program, decided it was going to go ahead with this lengthy process of writing an RFP and during that process there was open discussion about what this program was going to consist of, but the city was a little cagey as to what it was precisely going to ask for in the RFP. But what it was very up-front about was they were arguing that the contractor would be asked to provide the capital in order to construct the facilities. And that aced out a lot of smaller waste haulers in the area who might have been very interested in doing it...."

Further alienating taxpayers, environmentalists, and other firms, the CRC director noted that the city made still another unorthodox decision:

"That was the idea, that the contractor would build the facilities and the city would pay the contractor on an annual or a regular basis for the processing and the materials and the disposal of the materials. And so the contract negotiations began and basically there were only two companies accepted into those contract negotiations — Waste Management and Ogden Projects (part of Ogden Martin corporation, a multinational firm). And mid-stream, halfway through the negotiations on the contract, the city announced that they felt they would save money in the long run if they paid for the capital construction of the facilities instead of asking the contractors to bear the costs...it's like \$54 million the city is going to pay in capital costs and then additionally Waste Management is going to make a lot of money on annual fees and depending on how well the program works, in terms of the city's own costs, if the program does poorly they'll pay more. So basically they're [the city] going to pay for half the facilities. Even though it's a Waste Management-owned facility."

To add insult to injury in this regressive social redistribution of municipal revenues, the Blue Bag program failed to deliver on its main ecological promise: to efficiently recycle the city's waste.

Miscalculation #2: Low Recovery Rates

The Blue Bag program was premised on two assumptions about keeping recovery rates high and costs low:

- A. Blue bags would allow for one truck and single work crew to pick up recyclables and non-recyclables. This would lead to a higher percentage of recyclables being recovered from the waste stream as the non-recycling bags could be sorted for recyclables. It would save money by avoiding the purchase of a separate fleet of trucks and the hiring of drivers. As CRC's Ann Irving explained, "It just was appealing to streets and sanitation because there was no need to change the way they collect materials. It's just garbage collection basically."

(2) A high-tech facility would allow for the hiring of cheap, part-time labor without impacting recovery rates.

Both these assumptions turned out to be false. Furthermore, the miscalculations led to very low recovery rates. While the city did not have to purchase two sets of trucks, it did have to purchase a more expensive truck. Furthermore, the sorting of regular trash required expensive technological additions for the processing, which dwarfed the costs of a second set of trucks and drivers. The Chicago Recycling Coalition stated:

"The city claims that the Blue Bag program is cheaper because it avoids a separate pick up of recyclables. But the program will use expensive garbage packer trucks to pick up recyclables, where cheaper trucks and smaller crews could be used. Also, any savings on the collection costs will be lost because the blue bag program will have higher processing costs. This is because the labor and machinery involved in separating and processing the blue bags is more expensive than the processing of recyclables collected separately" (internal memo, CRC).

The initial recovery problem concerned both the blue bags and the trucks collecting them. In order to make pickup inexpensive, the city purchased trucks that compressed the bags. When the bags were compressed, however, they broke. By the time the garbage arrived at the MRRFs, they emerged as a messy melange. Workers were confronted with a truckload of garbage mixed together with the recyclables in the blue bags. Most workers accordingly felt that their job had little to do with recycling and more to do with picking through garbage. The advantage of being able to sort through the raw garbage was far exceeded by the disadvantage of having lost a lot of the clean, separated recyclables. The Chicago Recycling Coalition noted:

"The system mixes all recyclable materials together in one bag. Recycling industry representatives say that much of the material will be poor quality and difficult to recycle. FSC Paper, the area's main newsprint buyer, has said that newspaper contaminated with glass shards will damage its machinery. If the city is unable to sell the materials, they will have to be landfilled or incinerated, which defeats the whole purpose of the program. The city and Waste Management will not be able to sell these low-grade materials for top dollar, so the overall cost to taxpayers is likely to be higher." (internal memo).

To overcome this problem, the recyclables had to be sorted by hand. The MRRF was designed as a high-volume process. Because the actual operations left a high percentage of the waste stream unsorted, due to the breakage of blue bags, substantial amounts of raw garbage proceeded down a line at a fast speed. Recovery was then dependent upon workers doing a careful job of sorting. So highly productive workers were needed. The system, however, was

built on keeping labor costs low. This was done in a number of different ways, mostly through a temporary job service, Remedial Environmental Management (REM).

In recent years a powerful lobbying force in Washington, D.C. for temporary employer firms has emerged and fundamentally changed labor legislation. Technically, workers at the Waste Management MRFs were not employees of Waste Management or REM. Rather, due to recent changes in labor laws they were “consumers” of REM’s services (Gonos 1997). Thus, they had no legal rights as workers and no legal relationship to Waste Management. This allowed REM to pay the workers very little, without concern for minimum wage laws. Waste Management was also free to mistreat the workers without fear of major lawsuits. REM “employees” were routinely overworked and underpaid.

Additionally, there were no fringe benefits, no upward mobility, no pay raises, nor union representation. To keep costs low (having overspent on technology) there was no heat or air conditioning. Anyone familiar with Chicago weather knows that this means the facility was almost always unbearably cold or hot. Since it contained raw garbage, the odors often made employees nauseous. So the workers, not surprisingly, were not highly productive, nor were they loyal to a firm that offered them no security. In the end, recovery rates were low, indicated by the city’s reluctance to release the recycling figures. Several deadlines passed before the Department of Environment made the numbers public, at which time they were presented in a format that was confusing and full of errors. One ex-manager of a Waste Management MRF informed us that he had witnessed managers deliberately inflating recycling numbers in several of the MRFs: “They started off from day one padding and changing the numbers that were being reported to the city. I would question anything they submit. I really would.”

Miscalculation #3: Occupational Safety Issues

Aside from the question of costs and recycling quality, the biggest problem with the Blue Bag was one that Waste Management never anticipated or seriously considered — labor safety. The city and Waste Management grossly miscalculated the environmental and safety issues, which is ironic given that recycling was touted as a socially responsible initiative. There were substantial problems with occupational safety and the hazardous working conditions laborers faced in the MRFs. The Chicago blue bags were processed in a “dirty MRF,” where the bulk of the materials sorted was municipal solid waste, a material that presents a serious health hazard when sorted by hand.

We interviewed more than two dozen workers and managers who were employed by Waste Management in the Blue Bag system. The stories we uncovered resemble those told by laborers in the sweatshops, steel mills, coal mines, textile mills, and meat-packing plants of

nineteenth century industrial cities and those in the contemporary Third World. Workers regularly handled toxic substances on this job. This is because household hazardous waste is unregulated and was often contained in recyclable plastic and metal containers that the recycling centers collected. As one worker explained, he came into close contact with "anything and everything that people just normally throw out in their garbage." This included bleach, battery acid, paint and paint thinner, inks, dyes, as well as razor blades and homemade explosives.

Despite legislation governing the U.S. recycling industry, in 1994 it was documented that waste-industry employers failed to: keep a log of injuries and illness; provide proper protective gear and equipment to workers; post signs and notices detailing safety procedures and workers' rights; and communicate all possible work-related hazards to each employee (see Pellow, 1998). Like REM/Waste Management, most other MRFs are also non-union shops.

Recycling MRFs are also not designed for medical waste processing, but Blue Bag MRRF workers routinely handled these materials. Workers getting stuck with syringes and hypodermic needles is one of the most common and harrowing accidents in materials recovery facilities (Powell 1992), particularly given widespread fear of contracting HIV. An ex-Waste Management manager-turned-whistleblower stressed the following point in an interview:

"Let's take for example, the medical-waste issue alone. When you say, when you talk in terms of the whole medical field, it now has changed. Fewer and fewer people are allowed to stay in hospitals, most — practically every — procedure that they can think of that they could put into an outpatient basis, they're doing it. Which means that people are taking all kinds of hypodermic needles, colostomy bags, and all this stuff home and disposing of it in the garbage. Just say for example, all the people who are diabetics — all of the people who are forced out of the hospital because their insurance will not allow them to stay any longer, they feel like they can be better taken care of at home. Now they're sending in nurses, there's a whole network that they send out to people's houses. The reason I know this is because my dad just had serious surgery not too long ago. And he was taking all different kinds of injectables and he had a colostomy bag for a while. He's fine now, he still has a nurse visiting but he's not injecting anything anymore. But, my point is just think of all the people who have a legitimate use for hypodermic needles, have a legitimate, a hospital-prescribed use for all of these items that are normally disposed of in a hospital setting."

Later discussions with a practicing health professional confirmed that these practices were indeed widespread among hospitals. These environmental hazards added a new and disturbing dimension to the limited discourse around "the health care crisis" in this nation. Workers experienced shock and stress on a routine basis. For example, Edward, a former employee, told of a grisly incident that occurred during an evening shift:

"I worked in the primary department. That's where the trucks dump raw garbage right there. One time a dead lady was dumped on the floor in front of me....One woman [employee] fainted and everybody else was screaming. A couple of guys were just wandering around on the catwalk [a 40 foot structure] looking like they was dazed."

Later at the same MRF, two deceased human infants were discovered on the recycling line on different days. Psychological and physical hazards intermingled, as people desperate for gainful employment and job security were pressured to continue working in the face of gross health and safety violations. In a city where the African-American unemployment rate is greater than 50% in some neighborhoods (Wilson 1996), it was not difficult to understand why, as one worker explained, "You never turn down work when you're looking for it." However, he also reasoned that, "you also have to think of your safety because that job might be there next year, but if you contracted some disease, you might not be there next year."

Thus, the city grossly miscalculated the types of jobs that would be created. At the very least, the Blue Bag program created nearly 400 hundred jobs in the city. This was not an insignificant number of jobs. But the jobs offered little progressive redistribution. First, they paid below a living wage. The crucial issues of job quality and remuneration are often missed by poverty policy experts (see Wilson, 1996). For example, as recent research underscores, there is a sharp increase in the number of Americans who are working poor (Schwarz and Volgy, 1992). Thus, while a major problem in urban areas is under- and unemployment, these discussions often never raise the question of the deplorable working conditions and low quality of living that those who hold jobs experience on a daily basis.

Second, the Blue Bag jobs were short-term. The REM temporary hiring process seems to ensure that most of the workers will only be at the facility for a short period of time. Even if the pay were good, the workers were not employed long enough to get their families on their feet.

Third, they were deskilled jobs. Even though the facility had high-technology capital equipment, workers were not acquiring skills through the employment. Even if the jobs did not pay well and were short-term, they could still be good jobs if workers acquired skills, and were hence more marketable. These jobs failed to do this. Together, the jobs neither supported the community (through wages for families) or the future prospects of workers (by increasing human capital).

Fourth, the jobs created ill-will in the community. The MRFs continually used strong-arm coercive management styles. For example, after several workers spoke to journalists about the deplorable health and safety conditions in the plants REM issued a memo to its employees, "strictly prohibiting" any communication with the media. Workers were warned that "violation of

this work rule may result in disciplinary action up to and including immediate termination of employment."

Unfortunately, this was only the beginning. Workers regularly complained of being harassed by foremen and managers who rarely let them leave the sorting lines to use the bathrooms, and arbitrarily instituted mandatory overtime. As one whistle blowing ex-manager put it,

"[The managers']... philosophy was to keep your foot in their ass. That was their verbal philosophy as communicated to us. That is bound to fail. Nothing new about that....Yeah, you know that anybody working in those places needs a tetanus shot. You know with all of the dust and bacteria floating around in the air. If you bump your leg on a piece of metal and prick yourself...anything can happen....[they weren't given the shots]...Well it's because of the costs. The thing is that an enormous amount of money changed hands but all of the workers were circumvented from all that. They were the last thought of part of the puzzle. They had all of these specifications as to how the plant should be built, but they had nothing in regards to workers' safety, training, employee retention, none of that....Carl Dennis was the site supervisor for REM and when things took a turn for the worse when everybody started to riot at the Medill plant and all the [pay] checks were coming in bad [underpaid, miscalculated] , we had armed guards. I don't know if they were policemen or not, but they looked like street thugs. They were sitting around the dining room making sure that workers weren't going to bust any windows out or anything."

In summary, Chicago's program neither provided progressive social redistribution through its MRFs, nor did it implement effective materials recycling. Proponents of recycling were sharply critical:

"Attempts to implement similar programs in other cities have run into problems. Houston decided to dump the Blue Bag after a 10-month pilot test. In Omaha, Nebraska, the contractor separating the blue bags went bankrupt a few weeks after the program was implemented. Waste Management, Inc. now sorts the blue bags in Omaha but at a much higher cost than Chicago [officials] estimated its Blue Bag program would cost. In Brown County, Wisconsin, the Solid Waste Department conducted a test, mixing plastic bags of recyclables in with garbage and deemed it a failure." (Chicago Recycling Coalition, memo)

Even within the recycling industry, there was considerable skepticism about Chicago's program:

"...the Blue Bag program is a farce. It hasn't worked anywhere else. We expect it to fail in two years at the most. They're not committed to recycling at all. In fact, an assistant to the Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Environment says that if the program does fail, at least the MRFs will make good waste transfer stations!" [Manager of a corporate MRF in Chicago]

Chicago's program represented the low road to economic development (Harrison 1994). It has been a program where profitability was gained by squeezing low-wage labor and producing questionable positive environmental impacts (Gordon 1996). This did not constitute development: it was nothing less than underdevelopment. It constituted a poor use of human, natural, and economic resources to the extent that the city, workers and the ecosystem were all taxed more than was necessary.

By 1997, even Chicago Department of the Environment officials were beginning to realize the extent of MRRF problems. Critiques by the Chicago Recycling Commission were being disseminated through local media, focusing especially on the low recovery rates — 5% rather than the goal of 25%. On the basis that these recovery/diversion rates were far below the contractual goals, the city refused payment to Waste Management. By that time, managers at the MRRFs had been replaced several times, as Waste Management sought to recover profits from what had been a losing proposition. When prices for recyclables decreased, in fact, Waste Management had essentially passed through the MRRFs most of the waste stream, and collected their waste-hauling fees, rather than seeking recyclable sales.

Chicago escalated its control over WMI managers, through retaining an independent consulting firm to advise on improvements in the sorting centers. In its efforts to tame and redirect this organization, it initiated a variety of changes in the MRRFs. These were aimed both at improving recovery rates, and at improving working conditions. Generally, these tended to raise the operating costs at the MRRFs, and so Waste Management officials reacted quite negatively to these proposals. According to a former senior Chicago official, Waste Management initially attempted to use its political connections to offset the new controls. This official indicated that Waste Management "never expected to have its contract actually enforced by Chicago." But Chicago's political leaders firmly indicated that they expected such compliance, and the city staff pushed forward their proposals.

After much foot-dragging, Waste Management brought in a new manager for the MRRFs, someone with a history of turning around failing operations. This seemed to augur a new era for Chicago, as there was for the first time an actual partnership between the city and its contractor. Our interviews with the manager indicated that he saw improvement of working conditions as a key component of raising productivity levels in diverting materials at the sorting centers. Under his leadership, a variety of work changes were initiated. Improvements included: new heating and cooling of the MRRFs to enhance worker comfort; establishment of union status for the sorting workers, through REM, and sustained attention to reducing turnover rates (which approached 30% per month in the early years).

According to this official, for the first time, sorting workers, city staff, and managers began to work collaboratively. The sorting line was slowed down, and the height of materials on the line reduced, so that workers had more access to recyclable materials. City staff and managers engaged in line sorting, to understand some of the sorting problems. Managers sought insights from workers about how to improve the sorting productivity. As these suggestions were followed and productivity raised, a new bonus scheme was introduced. Workers' pay bonuses ranged as high as \$1.60 to \$2.13 an hour, in addition to their base rates of \$6.50 to \$8.00 per hour. These bonuses were paid to an entire shift of workers, based on the volumes of materials they successfully extracted from the sorting line. Perhaps as a result of this, within two years, recovery rates appeared to meet or exceed the 25% goals.

While these reforms were laudable, at least two problems remained. First, the Blue Bag is a system that was unilaterally chosen by the city and its corporate partner, over the objections of all of Chicago's major environmental organizations. This process created ill-will among organizations that had been working to protect the local environment and provide recycling services to Chicago communities for decades. That political divide remained, and will likely resurface when the city attempts to renew Waste Management's contract. Second, the labor process in the MRRFs is still fundamentally unsafe, because of the mixing of municipal solid waste with recyclables. The manual sorting of solid waste is a practice that many nations have banned because of its high risk to human health. The presence of hazardous, medical, and infectious wastes in these MRRFs will continue to plague workers, the city, and Waste Management. The Blue Bag remains a "dirty MRF" system.

6. CASE #2: SOCIAL PLANNING FOR MARKET ACTIVITY: RECYCLING IN EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

"When society and the system has beaten you down so much and you've basically given up and you've been through a lot of programs before where they promised something to you and didn't deliver and now there's something that works, people are willing to try. Once they get in here and they see that it works or if a close friend had been in here and knows that it works, they want to try. I've got young people coming in here who are in gangs who really don't want to be there. It is because they have nowhere else to turn. If they have something that can keep them off the streets, and keep them out of the gangs, then they won't be there. I've had young guys come in here before and tell me 'I don't have any work experience; I've never worked before but I don't want to be on the streets. I'm tired of being in gangs. I want something to do with my life, in my spare time.' And here's a program that gives them that opportunity, and that's what attracts them to it."

This was the perspective of the Program Coordinator of Futures Through Recycling, the Private Industry Council of Northern Cook County's (PIC) venture with the Evanston Recycling Center. Evanston is a suburb of Chicago, immediately to the north of that great industrial city. Founded in the 1850s, a city marked by great contrasts, and in this sense it mimics its southern neighbor, Chicago, with a growing divide between those segments who benefit from the increasing level of development and those who are left out. Evanston's African-American community is highly segregated, located within a narrow space along the city's western border. As is the case nationwide, poverty is on the rise in this African-American community.

Despite these divisions and extant inequalities, Evanston has long enjoyed a reputation for moral reform.

"In the twentieth century, Evanston has led in the resolution of urban controversies, including initiation of zoning to protect the residential character of its neighborhoods in the 1920s, an innovative integration plan for its schools in the 1960s, plans to preserve its architectural heritage and the same time provide affordable housing for its low-income residents in the 1970s, providing shelters and support for the homeless and plans to revitalize the downtown business district in the 1980s." (Lindstrom, Traore, and Untermeyer, 1995)

Continuing this progressive tradition, in the 1990s Evanston's leaders conceived of a recycling program to save both at-risk teenagers and natural resources. The Evanston recycling program was remarkably similar to the Chicago Blue Bag program. Both programs operated on a fairly conservative and mainstream recycling production network. Recyclables were placed on the curb by residential and commercial units. The recyclables were picked up and taken to a MRF, where they were sorted and baled for resale. The materials were then sold on the open market to an array of brokers and firms.

Upon closer inspection, however, these two programs could not be further apart in process and outcome. Evanston made two shifts in developing their program. First, the program was based on the quality of the recyclables, not quantity. Recyclables did not arrive at the Center after having been emptied from trash cans. They were placed in specially marked plastic bins and picked up by recycling trucks operated by the City of Evanston and Browning-Ferris, Inc. (BFI). There was no effort to recover recyclables from municipal solid waste, as in the Blue Bag program. This means that the work was not as hazardous as working in a dirty MRF. Additionally, nearly 100% of the volume received at the Evanston MRF went to market. This is in contrast to a dirty MRF (i.e., the Blue Bag program), where the great majority of the volume is trash and destined for landfills or incinerators. For Evanston's program, at every step of the process, the emphasis was doing things right, as opposed to doing as much as possible.

Secondly, Evanston approved a recycling program in return for the project's contributing to some other local program. Traditionally, such "linkage programs" entail public-private bargains, to spread the benefits of private development. Developers gentrifying a depressed area, for example, might be required to pay for low-income housing in a different area. The Evanston program extended the concept of linkage. It entailed a true public-private partnership that tied together job-retraining needs for low-income residents, with the ecological and fiscal goals more typically associated with recycling programs.

Pick-up of recyclables was shared between the city, for residential units, and private contractors covering multi-unit and commercial buildings. The recyclables were taken to a city-owned MRF. The MRF was run as a job-retraining program. The retraining component of the MRF was run by the Private Industry Council of Northern Cook County (PIC), funded through the federal Job Training Partnership Act of 1982. PIC operated with donations from the private sector and some federal money.

There were two key persons who directed the Evanston/PIC center. One was the Recycling Coordinator, a woman whose job included locating brokers and purchasers for recyclable materials, weighing in trucks, and even bandaging up workers' cut fingers. One could only marvel at her business acumen, her ability to "multi-task," and her skills as a mentor. She brought to the program a philosophy similar to that which drives many socially responsible businesses. Her thinking was embedded in the realities of the marketplace, but her goals are social and ecological.

The other key person was the PIC's Program Coordinator and worker-trainee supervisor, with experience in worker training, retraining, and counseling. He had worked with youth and adult men and women who had had bouts with homelessness, drug addiction, time in prison, and corporate downsizing. He boasted about the PIC's successes, but was also a realist. This African-American male provided a valuable cultural link to the mostly African-American crew of trainees at the MRF. He never shied away from discussions with PIC trainees about racial discrimination in the workplace and in society in general. In fact, he integrated Black History into the curriculum at the MRF. He was also about the business of producing a quality product and preparing workers for the competitive job market.

Together, these two administrators ran the facility, making the city and PIC's public-private partnership work. The city was charged with bringing in recyclables and selling the baled materials. PIC was charged with the sorting and baling. PIC hired at-risk teenagers and unemployed adults as trainees into an eight-month retraining program. Once accepted into the retraining program, the trainees worked at the MRF four days a week. On the fifth day they attended a job-training seminar held in a classroom built into the MRF. Trainees had to be residents of the City of Evanston and to be receiving some form of welfare in order to be eligible

for the program. The idea, as one manager put it, was "we're putting the money back into the community."

Most of the trainees were African-American males who came from families living in poverty. The trainees were often former gang members who had had trouble with the law. Ages ranged between 15 and 35, although most were between 18 and 25. Trainees were originally hired on a 60-day probationary period. They were screened for drugs and put through a rigorous training period, where they were closely watched by supervisors. The idea was to use the early days to teach them good work habits and good work skills, which would be needed to gain and retain employment. A supervisor stated:

"you're going to get a lot of people with some rough edges that don't know how to be at work on time... With a lot of these guys I end up doing parenting skills... Helping them know them to know what a budget is like and know the importance of having a savings account."

Evanston's recycling coordinator stated, "There are a lot of benefits to the program. Some of these kids don't know how to make phone calls or to make an appointment to see somebody." These basic skills — often called "life skills" (Auletta 1982) — are an integral part of many welfare-to-work training programs. Many of the program participants came from communities where a significant number of adults did not hold regular jobs, and this lack of work severely impacted the life chances of young adults (Wilson 1996).

The trainees worked from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on a conveyor belt sorting recyclables. There were two work lines in the MRF. One conveyor belt was for paper products, including newspapers, cardboard boxes, and magazines. The other conveyor belt was for wet products, including glass, plastic bottles, aluminum and steel cans. Trainees were rotated so that, to quote a supervisor, "positions don't get so boring." Trainees sat on the lines removing anything that was not recyclable. There was emphasis on making sure that poor quality products (too dirty or contaminated) were pulled. Quality superseded quantity. The managerial philosophy was that they would rather ensure a good price for the product, while teaching good work habits, than get a low price and teach sloppy work habits. Discipline, patience, quality control and teamwork were the habits trainees acquired there, which helped them secure and retain future employment.

The work at the MRF was also specifically designed to give trainees the esteem, skills, and networks needed to gain long-term, living-wage employment. This was done in a number of ways. Within the first few weeks, every trainee was put through a two-hour motivation and self-esteem class. The Friday seminar was also seen as pivotal to the success of the MRF and the training program. Classes varied, although each was designed to provide a range of professional

and personal skills. The idea was give people the opportunity to turn themselves around. The PIC supervisor stated:

"we get people in here who have hit rock bottom, whose self-esteem is very low. And we all know that, as human beings, once your esteem goes then you basically have no purpose for living. So this program really gives a lot of people a second chance... That's what makes the program so fascinating, to see people turn themselves around like that. "

Classes rotated. Some classes were more skills-oriented, where a professor from a local community college helped worker-trainees upgrade their math, reading, and writing skills. Other classes were more practical or life-oriented, with experts from the community lecturing about personal finances, health issues, and community concerns. Unlike most job retraining programs that screen in only those applicants who are most likely to succeed, the Evanston program purposely tried to attract the "hard core." They wanted to find those kids who were capable, but not likely to find a way through other pre-established channels. It was the Friday classes that turned many of them around.

One Friday, the instructor led the trainees through a series of exercises. They started by talking about different people's strengths and weaknesses. The PIC supervisor said, "I would like somebody to give me their definition of a weakness and your definition of a strength." His goal was to empower trainees, to feel their strengths and to work on their weaknesses. Their discussion was quickly geared toward job interviews, whereupon he told them, "now when you identify your weakness in an interview, identify it in a positive sense, which means that you know you have this weakness, but you're doing something about it." The discussion was both practical and personal.

If the trainees made it through the program for eight months, PIC would help them locate employment. The PIC representative worked closely with area companies spread throughout the nearby suburban areas. Mostly, he spent time building relationships and convincing personnel managers that PIC would send them good employees. The PIC had such a good reputation for producing reliable employees that employers were often unconcerned about a trainee's poor work history. Personnel managers then agreed to interview trainees for available jobs. The jobs were posted on a bulletin board at the MRF. PIC screened the trainees to make sure that they would represent the program well. PIC also set up the interviews. Trainees were paid for the time and travel expenses required for the interview. Most trainees got jobs on the first or second interview. While the jobs were mostly in manufacturing, transportation, and the city government, the pay was good. Most trainees earned within the \$18-\$25 US per hour range.

PIC also funded educational opportunities. For those trainees who wanted to aim for higher paying jobs, or jobs with long-term career ladders, PIC would pay the cost for them to

earn their high school and/or junior college degree. PIC paid for the books, fees, and tuition, helped trainees locate appropriate schooling programs, fill out applications, and get accepted. The relationship between PIC and area colleges seemed to open avenues that would otherwise not have existed, given trainees' work histories.

Relationships were the way things worked at the Evanston MRF. Two of the most important functions of the PIC were made possible through relationships. These functions were recruiting good workers and finding good market prices for materials. Most trainees heard about the program through word-of-mouth from friends and relatives. Every trainee we interviewed found out about the job through some such network (Granovetter 1974). Typically, such types of networks rarely exist between low-wage trainees and higher paying jobs (Wilson 1987).

Finding good prices for recyclables could be frustrating and hard work in this volatile market. Evanston's recycling coordinator sought to build relationships with buyers and brokers whom she could trust. She told us: "I don't always sell to the same people, but I do try to establish relationships with people that I feel are honest and treating me properly." This social element of business is often lost on neoclassical assumptions of marketplace behavior (Williamson, 1985; for a critique see Granovetter, 1985). The success of the program appeared extraordinary. First, the program allowed the city to run a successful recycling center, even through the market slump of the early 1990s. Labor costs were kept low without devaluing the workers. Rather than pay the normal \$7-\$10 hour, trainees were paid \$5 an hour. The city saved money on the program and workers understood that it was a step up to higher wages.

Second, the City produced one of the highest quality recyclables in the area. Even during market slumps they were able to get top dollar for their product. The quality can be attributed to accepting only source-separated recyclables (i.e., no garbage), a managerial emphasis on quality control, and training workers to be very productive. The worker productivity is directly related to the satisfaction of the trainees. The PIC supervisor informed us that

"For example, with newspaper the City of Evanston gets \$100 a bale (a great price at the time other places were getting \$80-\$90). And it's not because it's the City of Evanston, it's because we have good trainees that are doing an outstanding job. Because if they didn't clean the stuff out like it's supposed to be, they wouldn't get that type of money for the product."

Ecologically, the program produced a clean product, while diverting more than one million pounds of recyclables from the waste stream each month. Because of the program's successful efforts, they were awarded a \$60,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs for capital upgrades. If the recycling part of the Evanston PIC program was going well, the employment component was just as successful. The center was proud of its high

job placement rate, where nearly 90% of the trainees acquired gainful employment in nearby businesses.

Yet within several months of this positive assessment, the rug was pulled out from under this program, because of municipal budgetary pressures. Evanston's Director of Management and Budget described the recycling program the following way, to the City Manager:

"The Recycling Center opened in March of 1992. At the time, municipalities across Illinois were responding to the State of Illinois mandate that required the reduction of materials in the waste stream. Recycling was new and the future of the market was unclear. The Recycling Center was built with the vision that the city could save money in three ways: by diverting material from the waste stream; by not having to transport large amounts of material to a site outside of the city thus reducing transportation and labor costs; and by the sale of processed materials. The sale of material and the recycling surcharge of \$1.00 per month per household was expected to make the recycling program a self-supporting enterprise. Unfortunately, the recycling market has changed dramatically and the City can no longer compete in the market place." (Casey and Steen, 1998:1)

That a management and budget officer should stress the economic factors in recycling was perhaps not surprising. What was more surprising was how much this framing was echoed by political representatives and officials in the city. Even the director of the Recycling Center herself noted economic problems. In part, this was because a new waste hauler was now diverting valuable, high-quality office paper from Northwestern University away from the Evanston MRF. We thus had witnessed a process in which an operating program, with elements of sustainable community development, had been attained in Evanston. But we had also found that it was no longer capable of being sustained politically. With regard to the PIC program, only one defense was offered:

"[Superintendent of Streets and Sanitation] brought up the retraining component of the Recycling Center, noting that the program *has value to the community: it has made a number of residents working and taxpaying citizens*. This component would need to be explored. To Alderman Rainey's question, [the Superintendent] said the budget to pay PIC for employees and two supervisors is \$195,000. The pay range is minimum wage, he believed, and they work five days a week, including four hours of training on Friday." (Nilges, 1998: 3; italics ours)

While briefly acknowledging the value of this connection, one alderman simply stated:

"...we have to fulfill our responsibility to programs like this one, though he said no one would maintain that this program *has to remain in business*. He felt it would be

appropriate to examine programs like that for other activities, *but to keep doing what we're doing just for that program would be self-destructive, and said we could still pursue our obligation to support training programs.*" (Nilges 1998: 3; italics ours)

Yet, within a short period after an initial committee meeting in 1998, the City Council abandoned the recycling program and its PIC component, contracting further recycling to a private contractor, Groot. Ironically, Groot would transport Evanston's recyclables to a dirty MRF outside the community. In a painful inversion of the social linkage of PIC, one alderman noted that

"... it was *the responsibility of Workforce Development Council {PIC} to place their participants [in jobs]....* She noted that we should *let it be known that we have recycling trainees who could be hired by recycling companies.* (Nilges, 1998: 4-5, italics ours)

To lower the current modest costs of recycling in the community (about \$1-\$2 more per month per household than other suburban communities contracting out these services), the political-economic winds in Evanston battered and dismantled an unusually socially- and ecologically-productive program.

7. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

The concept of the treadmill of production captures the complexity of choices that can and must be made in a dynamic political economy. There are many different ways to build the vibrant economy needed to sustain communities. With each of these approaches comes a series of choices. Chicago and Evanston illustrate patterns of political choices within the treadmill, which reflect the dialectical relations between corporate exchange-values, and social/ecological use-values (Schnaiberg, 1994). Dialectically, conservatives argue that it is difficult to reduce poverty without first achieving economic growth. Distribution requires having something to distribute (Schnaiberg, 1980: ch. 10). While we can redistribute the material benefits from earlier growth periods, this is a more painful and politically problematic strategy. Yet it is equally true, as structuralists argue, that growth does not necessarily lead to poverty reduction (Harrison, 1994, Gordon, 1996). In fact, the treadmill model emphasizes that many forms of modern growth are achieved precisely at the expense of social needs and ecological protection (Schnaiberg, 1980, Schnaiberg and Gould, 1994).

Within any dynamic political economy, even within the treadmill of production, political choices can still modify economic means to meet some social and ecological goals:

"...the inquiry into the functioning of the market continues to be made in a manner which largely ignored the social nature of the problem....New institutional economics looks at not only market coordination but also non-market coordination within and between enterprises, and also at the determinants of the scope of individual enterprises....Our theory of state intervention also suggests that there are many possible types of state intervention ...neither the market, nor the state, nor any other economic institution is perfect as a coordination mechanism...[T]his means that each country has to decide on the exact mix between the market, the state and other institutions...through a process of institutional learning and innovation." (Chang 1994: 131-136; emphasis ours)

The tales of Chicago and Evanston illustrate the dynamics of the dialectical system within the treadmill of production. To some extent, the Chicago case tilted almost fully towards economic interests early in its history. With growing public pressures from local interest groups, and a failure to meet the state's recovery goals, the city created a new synthesis, in which political factors became more pervasive. While the revised MRRF structure still is predominantly oriented to exchange-values, officials exerted more political control over this market to improve working conditions, wages, and thereby to increase recovery rates.

Evanston, in contrast, started with strong political control over market transactions, designed to achieve both ecological and social goals. This potentially sustainable structure functioned only for a short period, though. When tax pressures grew within Evanston, the executive and political arms of the city rescinded their support. One way in which this process was facilitated was that neither the PIC trainees nor any of their representatives were powerful stakeholders in local politics. Hence, the social costs of abandoning the Evanston MRF were minimized in the local definition of the situation, and the economic benefits were highlighted instead.

Communities need to make political choices between the levels of economic growth, social programs, and ecological protection. Our thinking is similar to the observations made by economists Louis Ferleger and Jay Mandle (cf. Lindblom, 1977; Williamson, 1985):

"Precisely because planning and markets both have advantages and disadvantages, a combination of the two is inevitable. Depending on the mix, for example, a society will tend either in the direction of equality or in the direction of growth. Extensive use of markets may result in the latter, while containing them may produce the former. The point to be made in this regard, however, is that there are no a priori technical criteria to appeal to in deciding on the combination of growth and equality to be sought. What is essential, then, from our point of view, is that this decision be made by the people of the society through a democratic political process. Market hegemony should not be unchangeable; it should not be beyond political discourse. The extent of the use of the market should be politically determined. The same is true for issues such as the extent of private versus public ownership and the degree to which profitability alone, as contrasted

with other social or ecological considerations, should determine what is produced. The combination of market and planning to be used should be subject to constant evaluation and adjustment as circumstances and attitudes change" (Ferleger and Mandle, 1994:123).

The strongest dynamic that arises from the present political-economy of the treadmill is a commitment to corporate-centered development. This commitment diverges into a belief that the only way to reduce groups' social risks of being deprived of the benefits of the treadmill appears to be to speed the treadmill up through large-scale capital enterprises. Politically, this leads to an ideology that the state has no right to interfere with the "business of business" unless its actions involve unconditional support for capital. It also leads to a widespread social belief that we are locked into "this way of doing things." Too often, this form of development leads to a "low road" strategy of achieving economic growth, whereby the growth is achieved through the exploitation of people and natural resources (Harrison, 1994; Reich, 1992). The globalizing economy has a tendency to accentuate these shifts (Gould, Schnaiberg, and Weinberg, 1996).

Yet even within this macrostructure, there are some modest revisions in public agendas that can be achieved, where there is sufficient local mobilization of some socially progressive groups. Getting beyond capital-centered development requires a deeper understanding of the political choices within the treadmill, rather than its economic imperatives. At the level of community development, one popular and academic alternative to corporate-centered development is some vague notion of returning to localism. This nostalgia for localized economies ignores the fact that, historically, most such economies were neither egalitarian nor sustainable.

Historically, sociology is ripe with examples of oppressive communities from by-gone eras that should remind us that localized economies were often not great places to live. It is no better in contemporary times. Localized recycling usually takes the form of community drop-off centers, where the society's most marginalized members can drop off cans and bottles that they locate by scavenging through trash. When these centers work, as they do in some sections of Chicago (such as in public housing), they do not in fact pull people out of poverty. They only permit those in desperate poverty to continue to subsist on a meager diet and inadequate housing.

The diffused influence of the treadmill has led us to seek examples of social spaces where there are alternatives to the fantasy of *laissez-faire* corporate-centered development, and the nostalgia for localism. The Evanston program was one such exemplar embodying what we are coming to call a *pragmatic state*, following John Dewey's model of pragmatism (Pellow et al., 1995). Evanston's political leaders asked specific political and social questions about types of growth, and decided to generate a type of public-private investment that would lead to future growth. It developed its human resources (attracting higher wages), while it used its natural resources somewhat more wisely (staving off future problems). To do this, Evanston creatively

mixed market mechanisms with social and ecological planning. Yet with a slight alteration of the local economy and tax base, the mix was dramatically changed in 1998, and the achievements of the PIC-MRF program were largely ignored.

To do this, Evanston initially followed a more proactive state model, while Chicago's model was a fairly typical reactive role. Evanston initially chose what we call a "community-centered" approach to development, while Chicago initially chose a "corporate-centered" approach. The community-centered approach begins by asking what the local community's needs are and then selects from a broad array of institutions and organizations to help meet these needs. The corporate-centered approach usually begins with the assumption that only a narrow field of organizations and institutions can meet a community's needs — generally large corporations. Under this model, planners then ask how the local community can meet the needs of the corporation, rather than the other way around. The community-centered approach tends to build long-term relationships among workers, the state and corporations. The corporate-centered model tends toward "quick and dirty" transactions that are unstable and unsustainable in nature. Yet even in the corporate-centered approach, mobilization of local political opposition is possible, using both publicity and the enforcement of state laws to leverage new social and ecological arrangements.

Evanston's political officials initially saw their role as finding ways to harness the market in order to service the community. This was very different from Chicago's position. In our latest interviews, we found that Chicago actually chose to allow market actors to experience the growing uncertainties of recycling markets. They sought to limit the city's liability, to restrict Chicago's budgetary vulnerability to recycling market fluctuations, assuming that it would "all work out in the end." The city would have limited liability, and Waste Management would have incentives to increase recovery and sales of recyclables.

In Evanston, the local government tried to shape the market to fit the needs of the community. Both communities were willing to mix and match elements of public and market goods, but Chicago partly deferred to market organizations, while Evanston initially sought to bargain and negotiate. Evanston initially adopted a high road to growth, whereby profits were achieved through the enhancement of labor and natural resources. In this case, workers were given training and offered good job opportunities. Natural resources were carefully selected and time was taken to ensure the integrity of the resource. Evanston was able to produce a clean product efficiently. Firms were included in the process where they could aid in the development of workers' skills and/or were interested in purchasing quality material. Firms were excluded when they were interested in exploiting labor or natural resource conditions. Yet even with this powerful achievement, this program was eventually scuttled when it did not sufficiently "pay its own way" (Rinard and Sandin, 2001).

Ultimately, this required new frameworks for problem solving. In Chicago, urban problems were initially dealt with analytically. They were broken up into their smallest components, and these components were channeled to the appropriate agency where practical rules could be applied to solve the problem. Recycling was initially allocated to the solid-waste disposal agency, and only later administered by the Department of the Environment. By contrast, in Evanston, the state initially took an integrative approach to problem solving. Rather than break things into facts, tasks, and units, city managers integrated these problems into patterns, relationships, and partnerships. This was true for the whole recycling program, and especially for the MRF operation. At the present time, though, both programs have altered their mix of analysis and pragmatism — Evanston has become more economically analytic, and Chicago has become more integrative in the face of public pressures.

Thus, we note that the initial differences between these two municipal programs were considerable. In Chicago, we saw a policy approach that started with three simple assumptions:

- (1) the urban enclave was dependent upon attracting global capital;
- (2) a program had to be efficient, defined as producing high quantities at low costs;
- (3) the state had to be reactive, accommodating the community to the market.

Inherent in these principles were the following corollaries:

- (4) environmental protection could be achieved merely by allowing market forces to harness economies of scale in urban areas;
- (5) labor, whether coordinated through unions or community development organizations, had no role in this decision-making — and thus was not permitted to search for policies allowing for upward mobility or even merely for job security and safety.

In Evanston, we initially had a policy approach that started from a different place. Initially, Evanston viewed recycling as entailing a series of political and social choices. Market mechanisms were accepted as important ways to gauge only certain aspects of the project and to achieve much-needed revenues that would politically justify the program. Evanston had three different, yet equally simple, starting assumptions for its recycling program:

- (1) it was clear about the type of growth it wanted;
- (2) it was clear about the linkages between growth, environmental protection, and community;
- (3) and it was proactive about making it happen.

Within Evanston's program, the following corollaries of these principles were also noted:

(4) environmental protection was only going to occur when there is good planning, continuous evaluation, and hard work devoted to reorganization.

(5) even the poorest citizen-workers could achieve upward mobility, when they are incorporated as active agents in the planning and implementation processes.

This type of state decision-making cannot guarantee achievement of the current panacea of "sustainable development" (Schnaiberg, 1997). Ultimately, the Evanston program regressed into a "business as usual" framework. This led to outsourcing to the lowest-bid company, and to abandonment of the social program. Yet the initial commitment to a process of continually reflecting and refining practices, based upon what worked, was operating for some period. The end goal was to locate the "right" choices between the market for economic vitality, and political planning for social and ecological needs. Evanston's program may represent a case of how this can work successfully, but with the risk of dramatic shifts from social-ecological goals to economic ones. In contrast, Chicago's program appeared to represent everything that was wrong with not trying to break the dominant ideology and practice of corporate-centered development within the treadmill of production. Yet even in Chicago, the plan was to use the political power of the city to limit its economic vulnerability to market forces. When the program faltered, the city re-entered the process, to induce the contractor to meet the social (worker pay and protection) and ecological (recovery rates) needs.

"The concept of sustainability can be interpreted in either a limited or a broad sense. From a narrow economic perspective, it is synonymous with wealth creation or economic growth... However, in a more holistic sense, sustainability is essentially linked to broader societal goals: the requirements of sustainability and justice tend to coincide. This is related to the necessity of building durable social and economic structures, and of eliminating various forms of inequality." (David, 1988:153)

Local political pressures did produce some pragmatic shifts in Chicago. But the structure of even the "reformed" MRRFs never reached as close to sustainable development as the initial Evanston program. The tale of two cities can be told as a positive one, in which quite different political structures incorporated some elements of social and ecological sustainability. Or it can be told as a negative exemplar, of how sustainability promises become compromised and unattainable under economic pressures of the treadmill (Weinberg et al., 2001).

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