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Reflection Paper

This summer, I had a wonderful 10 weeks interning at the environmental nonprofit 350 Seattle. I had two discrete roles: helping to coordinate the organization's electoral endorsements, and helping to lead an initiative to build labor-environment solidarity in the fight for a citywide Green New Deal (GND). I loved both parts of the internship, and I learned a lot from each of them.

The majority of my time — maybe 60% — was spent helping 350 Seattle's 501(c)4 sister organization, 350 Seattle Action (350SA), make endorsements for several upcoming elections in Seattle and King County. I arrived just as the process was beginning, so I got to help write questionnaires for the primary candidates, schedule interviews with them, create grading spreadsheets for each candidate, and communicate with 350SA's endorsement committees about making their evaluations for each race. I also got to use my graphic design skills to create the endorsement graphics for each candidate, and then — because I was also managing 350SA's social media channels, and even created a new Instagram account for them — I got to make the big announcement across social media and via email to our supporters once everything was ready.

This process felt very in my wheelhouse — I loved creating spreadsheets, dealing with logistics, and communicating with the 350SA voter base. But I also appreciated the way it forced me to engage with Seattle politics in a way that I never have before. It was especially interesting to read through candidates' responses to our questionnaire, where they talked about issues like affordable housing, a just transition away from fossil fuels, accessible transit, and defunding the police. While creating our grading rubric, it was also very interesting to think about how to weight political experience when there might be a candidate who is more knowledgeable about environmental justice.

For the remaining part of my internship, I worked on a fledgling campaign from 350 Seattle to organize workers around GND policies. This was by far the most educational part of my internship, in part because my supervisor had me attend a series of trainings with several staff members and volunteers on worker organizing (in the context of a labor union). I really enjoyed learning some history of labor organizing, as well as some concrete strategies to build solidarity among workers. For example, there was one session devoted just to semantics — for example, what words should you use and not use when trying to recruit workers for a strike? We translated the sessions in an environmental organizing context by asking analogous questions, like how do you enlist tacit supporters to participate in a mass walkout for the climate, or attend a major protest?

Beyond the trainings, my work involved finding union members and people with union member contacts who were already part of 350 Seattle's volunteer network. The organization has lots of members who my supervisor thought might be bridges into the labor movement. I went through

volunteer lists and cold-called people for “one-to-one” conversations about the importance of building labor-environmental solidarity ahead of a renewed push for “Seattle for a Green New Deal” legislation. (350 Seattle and allies had tried unsuccessfully in 2019 to pass a slate of GND policies, including a ban on natural gas in new buildings, which failed due to 350 Seattle’s failure to connect with potential supporters in the labor movement — specifically the building trades.)

This part of my internship culminated with my own labor organizing workshop, which I held on the Friday before my last day at 350 Seattle. I designed promotional materials, email blasts, and did individualized outreach (over the phone and via email) to everyone in 350 Seattle’s closest network of volunteers (called “350 Seattle Friends”). I invited three speakers: two from the unions SEIU and SEA, and a third from Seattle’s chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America. The point of the workshop was to formally kick off 350 Seattle’s worker organizing project — it was meant to be educational (e.g., Why is a GND also pro-labor?), as well as an opportunity to recruit pro-GND labor union members ahead of 350 Seattle’s next push for building electrification.

This part of the internship was often very stressful! There was a big learning curve as I tried to learn 350 Seattle’s history with labor and memorize the organization’s talking points. I struggled to frame my one-to-one conversations as more than a one-sided request for union members to join our cause — I had to focus hard on building deep relationships rather than engaging in “extractive organizing.” But I think this is where I gained the most valuable experience. Relationship-building is critical to effective organizing for social and environmental justice, and my time at 350 Seattle made me much more comfortable with it.

My internship reinforced my desire to continue working in an advocacy space — at least on a volunteer basis. It strengthened my desire to work in the environmental space as well. I am currently working at Grist, an environmental news outlet, as part of a six-month fellowship, but once the fellowship is over, I will certainly look for employment at a place like 350 Seattle, where I can feel like I am working toward a more just and sustainable world.