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# REPORTER

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## ‘WIN THE LOTTERY OR ORGANIZE’: ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND LABOR ORGANIZING IN SILICON VALLEY

By Chris Benner

### *Introduction*

We mainly dream about our real lives....We dream that when we work hard, we'll be able to clothe our children decently, and still have a little time and money left for ourselves. And we dream that when we do as good a job as other people, we get treated the same, and that nobody puts us down because we're not like them. We dream that our jobs are safe, and secure, and when we're really on a roll—we even imagine that they're interesting and enjoyable!....

Then we ask ourselves, “How could we make these things come true?” And so far we've come up with only two possible answers: win the lottery, or organize. What can I say, except I have never been lucky with numbers. So tell them this....: tell them it may take time that people don't think they have, but they have to organize! It doesn't have to be through a union, because God knows unions have problems. So you can do it anywhere, but organize! Because the only way to get a little measure of power over your own life is to do it collectively, with the support of other people who share your needs.

These words are from Irma, a Filipina immigrant production worker in a high tech assembly plant in Santa Clara County.<sup>1</sup> Her impassioned plea highlights one of the central dilemmas facing the labor movement in this country—the need now more than ever for a prominent voice of marginalized workers, but confusion and cynicism about effective forms of organization. Union membership in the US. has declined to its lowest post-war level, with only 11.5% of the private sector work force unionized. The decline of unions is part of a broad restructuring of the economy in which there is increasing

bifurcation of the workforce and increasing subcontracting relationships that complicate the capital-labor relationship. In this context, a return to organizing, as advocated by the new AFL-CIO leadership, is only part of the solution. We need to be exploring new forms of labor organizing that can get beyond the limitations of traditional unionism. This articles highlight some of these efforts in the context of Silicon Valley, where the trends of the modern economy are particularly evident.

### *Inequality and Economic Insecurity in Silicon Valley*

Inequality in Silicon Valley is rooted in the occupational structure of high-technology industries themselves and the division of labor within the region. The dynamic growth and development of Santa Clara County, based on the explosion in information

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# LABOR UNION INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The twenty-five undergraduate interns enrolled in Economics 153 had the opportunity to spend eight hours a week this fall working with 18 different labor organizations in the Bay Area. Ellen Teninty worked closely with the unions last summer to develop internship projects that would provide a meaningful experience (and a 20-page paper!) for the interns and give unions a hand where they needed some assistance. Economics Professor Michael Reich again taught this popular course, with the assistance of Graduate Student Researcher Rob Wrenn.

Some of the projects that the students worked on were a survey of federal workers who don't belong to the union for AFGE, research, writing and speaking about the minimum wage for the California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, research on San Francisco tourism and profiles of hotel and gaming industry employers for HERE Local 2, a survey of unions for the Central Labor Council of Napa and Solano Counties, research on contract language and published articles for the Labor Project for Working Families, and working with the television series *We Do the Work* to develop a video to teach young workers their rights, and to develop a World Wide Web home page site for the television series.

Unions were able to accomplish research and communication that they would not otherwise have had the resources to accomplish at this time. Students had the chance to learn how local unions operate and the kind of people who are involved in the labor movement. They did research in areas that probably would not have occurred to them in other courses.

The course will be offered again in the Fall of 1996. Any organization that wants to participate in the internship program should call the Labor Center office at 510-642-0323.

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<b>REPORTER</b>
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## NOTES . . .

### *Looking for Labor Information on the Net?*

Back issues of the LCR, a list of publications and upcoming events, and more are all available on-line on the Labor Center's new gopher. Gopher to [violet.berkeley.edu](mailto:violet.berkeley.edu) port 2521.

We now have a home page on the World Wide Web! Our address, <http://violet.berkeley.edu/~iir/clre/clre.html>

### *Submissions to the Labor Center Reporter*

If you would like to submit an article for possible publication in a future *Labor Center Reporter*, send it to *Labor Center Reporter*, 2521 Channing Way #5555, Berkeley, CA 94720-5555, or e-mail it to [clre@violet.berkeley.edu](mailto:clre@violet.berkeley.edu).

### *Support the Labor Center Reporter*

With continuing budget cuts, the Labor Center needs your support now more than ever in order to continue to produce the LCR. You can use the update card on the back of this issue to help. Thank you.

*The articles in this issue do not necessarily represent the opinion of the Center for Labor Research and Education, the Institute of Industrial Relations, or the University of California. Each author is solely responsible for the contents of his or her article. Labor organizations and their press associations are encouraged to reproduce any LCR articles for further distribution.*



# FROM THE CHAIR

## *WELCOME TO NEW STAFF AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE*

I am pleased to announce that the Labor Center will have a new staff member arriving in January, 1996. Robert Redlo comes to us from a position as Director of the Public Service Training Program at the University at Albany for New York State, and will be receiving his Ph.D. next year. His years as Regional Director of ACTWU in New York, and Director of the Hudson Valley Benefit Plan have given him vast experience in negotiations and various forms of dispute resolution. More recently, he has used innovative multimedia techniques for delivering seminars, conferences and workshops through distance learning.

This fall, I have continued my work with training and facilitating joint labor-management problem solving teams in the hotel industry and the oil refining industry. Ellen Teninty came to work for us in the summer to set up internships for the Economics 153 course taught by Professor Michael Reich, ably assisted by Graduate Student Researcher, Rob Wrenn. Rob also continued his work organizing the LCR and working with Editorial Board. We have had with us briefly Administrative Assistant Pam Hava, who has done excellent work and will be missed.

The CLRE Advisory Board continued its discussions about the future of the Labor Center and its programs, using a process of facilitated meetings to brainstorm and prioritize what the labor movement would like to see happen at the Labor Center over the next several years.

Programs that we were already committed to include a conference on Unions Participating with Management, the second annual Young Unionist Leadership Conference, training and facilitation of joint labor-management problem-solving committees, continuation of the Bay Area Labor Studies Seminar series, and participation on the California Federation of Teachers Labor in the Schools Committee.

The Advisory Board used a weighted voting method to determine priorities for the future, which include a conference on successful global organizing strategies; a conference on the impact of technology in the workplace (including impact on traditional jurisdictions and long-distance learning); Pocket Guides on the topics of the ADA, how to organize, "right to work" and work and family law; computer training and classes for union staff and officers; union leadership training for Asian heritage rank and file; research and education programs for organizing the Asian community; co-sponsoring training for union participants on School-to-Career partnerships; and executive (advanced) leadership seminars on strategic planning for unions, local union management, and advanced "people skills."

While we will not have the resources to do all of the above immediately, it was good to get the input of our Advisory Board as we plan how to expand our resources.

Mary Ruth Gross

## ANNOUNCING

### *Unions Participating With Management Conference*

*April 21 & 22, 1996      Oakland Airport Hilton*

This 1½ day conference for union leadership and staff will provide an overview of what participating with management means and how this approach can fit in with a union's strategic plans; as well as workshops on more specific topics, such as getting started, problem-solving, and participation as an organizing tool. Co-sponsored by CPER, the conference will look at both the private and the public sectors. For additional information, please call 510-642-0323.

# SILICON VALLEY

*continued from cover*

technologies, has made it one of the wealthiest counties in the country, yet it has also produced a highly bifurcated workforce. This bifurcation is due in part to the employment structure of the electronics industry, which employs a relatively high proportion of highly educated professional and managerial employees, but also a large number of minimally skilled production workers, with few middle-level positions, and thus few opportunities for advancement within the industry. The bifurcation is also due to the expansion of jobs in building services, office administration, and retail industries, all of which support the material infrastructure of the high-tech industry complex, but are low-skilled and low paid.

In addition, the expansion of industrial sub-contracting has led to increasing casualization of labor and insecurity of employment. In the 1980s, companies began by downsizing, and streamlining their operations, contracting work out to specialized firms and temporary agencies. Initially this started with janitors and security guards, but has since expanded to nearly all levels of industry, including component manufacturing, professional and technical work. Corporations are rarely involved in all levels of production, and are instead replaced by networks of client firms and their contractors. These contractors have been competing furiously with each other, with increasing pressures to deliver services and goods at the lowest prices. This has led to drastic cuts in wages and benefits, especially in labor-intensive manufacturing and service industries. As companies shift jobs into this subcontracted economy, more and more workers have been pushed into poverty, widening the gap between rich and poor.

The result is a shrinking middle, with rapid expansion of both high-paid and low-paid work, a growing gap in-between, and few channels for those on the bottom end to benefit from expansion in high end employment. The top 20% of the population accounts for 48.2% of all household income, while the poorest 20% of all households have seen their share of total income fall to a mere 3.6%. Today one in seven children in the County live in poverty, as compared to just one in ten in 1980 and the number of people dependent on AFDC grew by a third in the three years from 1990 to 1993.

...has led to drastic cuts in wages and benefits, especially in labor-intensive manufacturing and service industries.

## *Failures of Traditional Organizing in the Electronics Industry*

Traditional union organizing campaigns in the electronics industry have been largely unsuccessful, as a sampling of organizing efforts shows:

- One of the earliest organizing efforts in the electronics industry in Santa Clara County was in 1973 at Tomco Electronics. The United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) secured enough support to conduct a recognition election, which they won in April 1973. The company immediately hired a leading union-busting law firm to pursue bargaining, and after two months the company locked out its employees. After two more months of employee picketing, Tomco terminated all operations. The UE charged the company with bad faith bargaining. The NLRB upheld the charges.

Management appealed the decision through the NLRB and then through the courts to the Supreme Court. In a precedent-setting decision the Supreme Court overturned the NLRB and excused Tomco's tactics as no more than 'hard bargaining.'

- In 1974 a majority of 160 workers at Siltec Corporation, signed with UE. Management acted swiftly to stave off the effort by firing fifteen key leaders. The union filed charges with the NLRB but did not prevail.

- In 1975-76, UE signed 65 percent of the 200 workers at Semi-Metals, and petitioned for an election. Under intense management pressure, UE narrowly lost the vote.

- In 1982, the Glazier's Union tried to organize Atari workers and collected enough signature cards to call an election. The union postponed an initial election, because company intimidation tactics had caused them to lose support. In February 1983, while the Glaziers were gearing up for another election bid, Atari announced that it was laying off 1700 employees and relocating production to Taiwan and Hong Kong.

- In October 1992, a worker at Versatronex confronted the employers with complaints of low salaries, no raises, a hazardous work environment and emotional abuse. The worker was fired, and 50 out of 86 Versatronex employees walked off their jobs to protest the company's actions. This was the first strike at a microelectronics firm in 40 years in the Valley. Versatronex eventually

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# SF HOTEL INDUSTRY FORMS JOINT LABOR-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES TO EXPLORE NEW WORKPLACE MODELS

by Mary Ruth Gross

In the spring of 1994, I started working with a group of San Francisco hotels and two of the unions representing hotel workers to help them implement an ambitious program designed to change the way the hotels and the unions, and the workers and management, relate.

Hotel negotiations were beginning in May with an August contract expiration date. The hotels wanted to avoid a strike and to eventually bring about a relaxation of work rules that they felt were hindering their flexibility in providing customer service and making a profit. The unions were facing a situation where a major hotel had just been sold and was reopening non-union. They wanted to create a climate where they could put less energy into fighting the unionized hotels more energy into organizing. At the same time, neither side was ready to plunge into a radically different way of doing business without some assurance that it would work to the benefit of all parties.

As a way to test the process, they decided to set up joint labor-management study committees, with the understanding that these committees were not intended to replace the collective bargaining process. The top

officers of HERE Local 2 and SEIU Local 14 formed a joint steering committee with top management from several of the hotels. This joint steering committee made decisions about the composition of the committees, compensation for participants, frequency of meetings, and committee training. They hired an experienced management consultant from the University of Southern California to coordinate the project, and five experienced facilitators, including myself, to facilitate the study-group meetings.

Before the study groups started meeting, I went with a group of about sixty managers and study-group members to tour the Toyota-General Motors joint venture in Fremont, California: New United Motors Manufacturing, Inc. The NUMMI plant has been studied as an example of a successful transplanting of Japanese teamwork and continual improvement into a formerly contentious U.S. auto assembly plant. Skeptical union members and managers heard from their counterparts and began to envision how the team concepts at NUMMI could be applied in a hotel environment.

The first phase of the process consisted of five committees set up by type of work: housekeeping,

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*In response to a frequently-asked question, there are several lessons I can draw from the first phases:*

- ◆ First, in order for a project like this to work in a unionized environment, the union has to be involved in making decisions about the project from the beginning and at all levels.
- ◆ Second, it takes more time and money than anyone ever expects to involve people in this change process. For example, the workers in the hotel's study groups were paid by their employers for the time they spent in meetings, and the union committed a large amount of staff time to the project.
- ◆ Third, we found that while there are many consultants who are familiar with management issues and practices, facilitators who also have an understanding of workers' and unions' concerns are essential.
- ◆ Fourth, both sides should be explicit in their expectations of how results will be used. For example, the hotel's joint steering committee crafted a joint statement of purpose, and both sides were consistent in their communications in maintaining the distinction between the study group process and collective bargaining.
- ◆ Fifth, communication has to happen regularly and honestly with the rest of the workers and managers who are not involved in the process, but who will be affected by changes in the workplace.

# IIR'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY:

On November 3, approximately 200 people came together at Alumni House on the U.C. Berkeley campus to celebrate the first 50 years of the Institute of Industrial Relations. Jack Henning, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, and George Schultz, former U.S. Secretary of Labor and former U.S. Secretary of State were honored at the gala dinner, which was widely supported by people affiliated with IIR in many ways: unions; faculty; businesses; and current and former students and visiting scholars.

Highlights of the evening included a welcoming address by newly inaugurated U.C. President Richard Atkinson, a presentation of a proclamation by Berkeley mayor Shirley Dean, naming November, 1995 "Industrial Relations Month" in Alameda County; the true history of IIR by George Strauss; and wonderful songs of work and unions performed by the Westwind International Folk Ensemble. Even Governor Pete Wilson sent a letter of commendation declaring, "I salute the Institute of

Governor Pete Wilson sent a letter of commendation declaring, "I salute the Institute of Industrial Relations for the vital bridge it forms between labor/management research and practice, a bridge which benefits employees and employers around the world."

Industrial Relations for the vital bridge it forms between labor/management research and practice, a bridge which benefits employees and employers around the world."

The presence of IIR Directors, from founder Clark Kerr to the current Director Clair Brown, contributed to the academic luster of the occasion.

Jack Henning's speech recalled the early days of the Institute and the long history of cooperation between the labor movement and the university community on projects of mutual concern, and George

Schultz recounted the lessons learned in labor relations that served him well in other contexts.

IIR's staff worked long and hard under the able direction of Development Officer Mary Kay Stuvland, to create an elegant and welcoming atmosphere for the guests and honorees. The enthusiastic and overwhelming support provided by labor for this event has created a momentum which is carrying forward in new collaborative efforts, including planning an oral history of Jack Henning and exploring the possibility of creating an endowment.

## CPER CALIFORNIA PUBLIC EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

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Now in its 28th year, *CPER* magazine is the bimonthly publication of the Institute of Industrial Relations' California Public Employee Relations Program.

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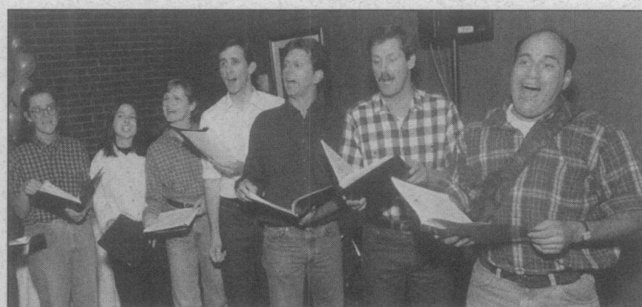
L to R: David Keicher—Field Representative, AFL-CIO, Region 6; Albin Gruhn—President, California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO; and Owen Marron—Executive Secretary, Alameda County Central Labor Council.



John (Jack) F. Henning—Outgoing Executive Secretary-Treasurer, California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO and 50th Anniversary honoree.



IIR and University of California officials pose with IIR 50th Anniversary honorees, L to R (standing): Sheldon Zedeck—Past Director, IIR; Clair Brown—Director, IIR; Ray Miles—Master of Ceremony & Past Director, IIR; Jack Henning—Outgoing Executive Secretary-Treasurer, California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO and 50th Anniversary honoree; Joseph Cerney—Vice Chancellor for Research, UCB; Lloyd Ulman—Past Director and 50th Co-Chair, IIR; John Cummins—Assistant Chancellor, UCB; (seated): George Strauss—Past Director, IIR; Richard Atkinson—President, University of California; Clark Kerr—Founding Director and 50th Co-Chair, IIR; George Shultz—Former Secretary of State, Labor, and Treasury.



Westwind Chorus of Westwind International Folk Ensemble performs songs of work & workers.



L to R: Lucile Miles—IIR Supporter; and Katie Quan—District Manager, UNITE.



L to R: Carol Vendrillo—Director, CPER; Bob Purcell—Attorney/International Representative, LIUNA; and Mary Ann Massenberg—International Representative, UAW.



L to R: Karen Perryman of UA 342 and IIR supporter; Robert Wise—Recording Correspondence Secretary, Operating Engineers, Local 3.

# SILICON VALLEY

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recognized the union, but at the same time announced it would close its Silicon Valley facility and terminate all operations.

- Union campaigns at Siliconix and National Semiconductors never reached elections. Other campaigns at Xidex and Raytheon failed to win a majority of worker votes.

It is thus clear that traditional union organizing tactics in the electronics industry have been largely ineffective. Company strong-arm tactics, and the threat of moving overseas have been major factors in limiting union success.

## ***Organizing Outside the NLRB Process***

The United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) had a strong organizing campaign in the early 1980s that didn't limit itself to traditional organizing campaigns. Instead, building on UE's history of social movement unionism, workers in a number of plants began organizing an Electronics Organizing Committee (EOC). The EOC established itself as a member organization and began functioning much like an established local union. Their focus was to organize struggles around day-to-day grievances and conditions, through which the EOC sought to demonstrate the power of collective action, even without a formal union recognition.

They led two successful campaigns at National Semiconductors in 1979 and 1981 around cost-of-living wage increases. They helped uncover the toxic impacts and hazardous working conditions of what was at the time thought to be a clean industry. The EOC collapsed into inactivity in 1984, after increased company harassment of committee members and sympathizers. Though they never received union recognition, they were able to demonstrate that an industry wide organizing effort not narrowly focused on obtaining union recognition at a single plant was able to have some impact on workers conditions.

## ***Justice for Janitors***

The Justice for Janitors Campaign of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1877 was particularly significant because of the strategic point of recognizing the links between the prominent high-

technology firms in the Valley and the range of service industries that provide infrastructural support. Rather than focusing on the small contracting firms that employed the janitors, SEIU held that primary companies must bear some responsibility for the working conditions of sub-contractors even if they weren't direct employees. Starting in 1989, Local 1877 pursued a three-pronged strategy:

- organizers worked to develop union support among janitors employed by contracting firms working in the region's major corporations.

- they organized public events, to focus media and public attention on the contractors and to place some of the blame for the janitors poor working conditions on the corporate clients who did business with non-union contractors.

- they pursued worker grievances and denunciations of abuses through appropriate legal channels.

After a successful campaign at Apple, other high-tech firms also capitulated quickly to union organizing efforts.

## ***Campaign for Justice***

The Campaign for Justice was a multi-union organizing effort, that used broad tactics of social-movement unionism, linking neighborhood organizing with workplace issues, and holding prominent employers responsible for working conditions in the companies they subcontract with. The campaign began a highly publicized effort in January 1994, intended to focus on workers in landscaping, manufacturing, laundry, food service and security businesses, with a focus on the sub-contracting arrangements that were increasingly common. One of the campaigns major goals was to demonstrate that contracting out is a form of public subsidy to private corporations, for instance when companies fail to provide workers health care, the cost is passed on to the public sector. The campaign fell apart due primarily to internal problems, but the public relations work was able to highlight the hardships due to the increase in sub-contracting.

## ***Working Partnerships USA***

Working Partnerships USA is a labor-community coalition that grew out of struggles around the state budget process. This led to a focus on broader economic

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development issues and the need for new thinking on organizing strategies. Working Partnerships was founded in January 1995, with major support of the South Bay Central Labor Council. It has a multi-pronged strategy that includes: working with local and county government around economic development policy; developing popular education programs designed to give community leaders additional capacity to come to the table as informed participants; and developing effective models of employee organizations, including job clubs, employment sourcing, employee owned hiring halls. The coalition won its first major success when the County Board of Supervisors passed legislation on September 19 designed to provide community standards for tax breaks to corporations in the county.

## ***Workers Centers: AIWA***

Asian Immigrant Women's Advocates (AIWA) is one of a number of workers centers which have grown in the last 10-15 years in response to restructuring of labor processes. Their focus is on the way low-wage workers find they are closed out of employment sectors, face on-the-job and housing discrimination, and find serious health and safety violations in the workplace. Combined with this are concerns about language and cultural barriers, a lack of power in their own communities, and undocumented worker status.

One key aspect is that they are a community-based form of worker organizing. Workers are not members because of being employed at a particular site, but retain membership even when changing jobs or unemployed. They are multi trade, uniting workers across industry lines while working with them in their own communities. In addition to focusing on wages, benefits and working conditions (including health and safety violations) workers centers might also focus on education (English literacy, worker's legal rights), housing and work discrimination, immigration, and lobbying for labor law reform.

## ***Lessons for Labor Organizing in Silicon Valley***

Despite the significant obstacles to workers collective mobilization, some promising steps are being taken. Innovative forms of organizing are being developed. Many of these forms are not entirely new to

union organizing, but the struggles in Silicon Valley highlight their importance in the new economic climate. Some key lessons include:

(1) **Linking community and workplace**—This provides a space for workers to share experiences and discuss strategies outside of the repressive atmosphere of the workplace. In an economic context that seeks to individualize workers, the common identity that can be built in community organizing is extremely valuable. Further, it provides an important link between workplace organizing and identity politics, particularly around ethnicity. Where community identity is more often centered around particular ethnic groups—Mexican, Filipino, Vietnamese etc.—linking workplace issues with these community ties both strengthens potential for labor action, while also helping to build bridges between potentially isolated ethnic communities around common economic struggles.

(2) **Breaking down public/private divisions**—Rather than focus solely on an employer, these campaigns depend to a large extent on public support, while also calling on elected officials to support fair employment practices in the industry. When employer-employee relations are treated as a private matter, it weakens workers ability to organize. For instance, certain constitutional rights are not protected in the private sector, as a prominent labor lawyer points out:

In the private sector, you do not have a constitutional right to free speech: if your employer makes a product which is unsafe, and you "blow the whistle" on him by telling the press, you can legally be fired...for doing it. Likewise, in the private sector, you are not innocent till proven guilty. When an employer disciplines or discharges you, you don't stay on the job until the grievance is arbitrated. Instead, you are off work and lose pay, and get the money back only if you win the grievance. [Lynd 1982]

Furthermore, working conditions in the private sector have, of course, profound impact on public sector policies. In the Justice for Janitors campaign, organizers highlighted the social costs of employers not providing health care. The costs of poor health and safety practices in the workplace are also shouldered by society at large.

(3) **Linking with a growing environmental justice movement**—Campaigns that link workplace safety and health issues with broader environmental concerns,

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provide a link with the growing environmental justice movement. Workers in high-technology firms gained new allies by linking exposure to harmful chemicals at the workplace with toxic dumping that affects the community as a whole. Labor struggles that specifically link workplace issues with environmental concerns immediately gain important and strong allies.

(4) **Targeting secondary employers**—A key focus of the Justice for Janitors campaign and the Campaign for Justice was the need to target secondary employers to take responsibility for working conditions in sub-contractors. This will be an important strategy for

confronting the problems associated with 'flexible production'. Of course, the key ingredient in such a strategy is the ability to find a 'lynch-pin'—a prominent company that does a lot of sub-contracting and has a high-enough profile and solid enough financial base that it won't shut operations in the face of a unionization drive.

While these various strategies are still far from solving marginalized worker's problems in the modern high-technology economy, they do provide some important lessons and demonstrate the importance of innovative organizing approaches.

<sup>1</sup> The quote forms the concluding statement in a remarkable study on immigrant women workers in Silicon Valley in the 1980s by Karen Hossfeld (1988).

## PUBLICATION SPOTLIGHT

### *California Workers Rights, Second Edition*

Californians have special and distinctive rights as employees. Hiring, firing, benefits, privacy, safety, and wages are all controlled by state laws which extend protections far beyond those provided under federal laws. Unfortunately, few workers are aware of these unique safeguards, and most enforcement agencies and lawyers are knowledgeable only in their specific fields. *California Workers Rights* is the only source of comprehensive information on this subject. It clearly and concisely explains the job rights guaranteed by California law, plus those federal provisions which provide stronger protections in specified situations.

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**CONFERENCE: SW LABOR STUDIES**

**Feb. 22-24, 1996** – “Preserving Labor’s History, Securing Labor’s Future” 22nd annual SW labor studies conference. \$50 (students free). Accommodations available. Location: 19th Ave./Holloway SFSU. For more information: 415-564-4010, larc@sfsu.edu

**GALA: LABOR ARCHIVES**

**Feb. 23, 1996** – The 10th anniversary gala benefit dinner of the Labor Archives & Research Center. Presentation of the annual Lifetime Achievement Award of the SW Labor Studies Association. Tickets \$100. Location: Sheraton Palace Hotel. For more information: 415-564-3606

## HOTEL

*continued from page 5*

kitchen, food and beverage service, bell/door/PBX and banquet. Each committee had twice as many rank-and-file workers as management, with the unions selecting the rank-and-file participants and top management selecting managers. The study groups met every Wednesday for twelve weeks to look at the issues of teamwork, training, scheduling and discipline. They were trained in their teams in group problem-solving. Group members reported to the Joint Steering Committee by making presentations on each topic, which they created from each group.

Both union members and managers were pleased with the degree to which each side listened to each other’s concerns and proposals for improving the hotels. Some of the study groups kept meeting past the original twelve weeks to address specific issues, and two of the facilitators met later with negotiators in the collective bargaining process itself to address some issues using an interest-based bargaining approach.

The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service has provided funding to help with setting up joint labor-management committees in each of the twelve hotels in the multi-employer group, to move this joint process into each workplace where it can impact the work directly. The FMCS, assisted by the facilitators, also provided training in communication and interest based problem solving for each of the 12 joint problem-solving teams. We critiqued the first of the series of trainings in

order to adapt it to the hotel industry and make the information as accessible as possible.

I currently facilitate the joint problem-solving teams at the Fairmont Hotel and the ANA Hotel. We spent several meetings after the FMCS training on building the relationships, developing groundrules and choosing the initial issues to be tackled. The groups wanted to start with issues that they could solve fairly quickly and easily. They chose the issues of developing a process for employee input into the selection of uniforms (Fairmont), and improving the employee cafeteria (ANA). The 12 hotels have also applied for training grants from the California Employment Training Panel, and the problem-solving teams in most hotels have taken the opportunity to look at the whole issue of training.

The actual content of the meetings has to remain confidential in order to promote a very open and honest exchange, but the teams send out mutually agreed-to reports on an as-needed basis, and use the written reports as “talking pieces” to let other employees know what is going on and to get their input. Now that the teams have gotten some practice at solving problems together, they are gearing up for some more weighty issues. Those of us working on the project are quite optimistic that the more difficult topics can also be tackled, and I look forward to reporting on future lessons to be drawn as we do so.

*This is an expansion of an article which appeared in the National Center for the Workplace Newsletter, Winter, 1995.*

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