

Unions, Politics and Democracy

Social Action in the Salinas City Firefighters Association IAFF Local 1270, AFL-CIO.

by Michael Wilson

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The Salinas Valley sits inland from the Monterey Bay and is cooled each morning by ocean fog, which creeps through a cleft in the coastal hills and blankets the endless rows of vegetable crops. This climatic phenomenon, and the billion dollar agricultural industry it engendered, earned the Valley the title, "Lettuce Capitol of the World". In fact, you can find the words, "Salinas, CA." on the plastic covering of the Fresh Express Corporation's pre-packaged salads in the produce section of supermarkets across the U.S. In an echo of John Steinbeck's descriptions of the Valley earlier this century, Fresh Express and other growers, packers and shippers of fresh vegetables are exempted from city business taxes by the Salinas City Code. Salinas is also the site of the lettuce strikes of the 1970s by the United Farm Workers (UFW), and, along with the Pajaro Valley to the north, it is now at the center of the struggle by the UFW to organize strawberry workers in California.

In the mid 1990s, I served as vice president and as president of the Salinas

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Joe Hill Wins Election: Tips for Door to Door Campaigning

by Perry Deess

Labor plays a direct role in political campaigns of all types and sizes. With labor's experience and it's large pool of dedicated volunteers, why do labor candidates so often lose small elections? In small districts the advantage of large volunteer pools can easily compensate for the modest financial advantage enjoyed by their business oriented opponents.¹ Unfortunately, as a Democratic campaign manager and political consultant, I have seen many seasoned labor organizers wilt during the campaign season. They have the volunteers and skills to make an impressive contribution through door to door campaigning, but their enthusiasm and determination dissipate in an unfocused plan. Often, they know how to motivate and organize, but they do not know how to make the most of their resources. Employing a few simple tricks from the political consultants' arsenal can help labor candidates deploy their resources more effectively.

Winning local elections is easy if you remember one word: TARGETING. Get the right message, to the right people, at the right time and your chances

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LABOR CENTER NOTES

This issue of the LCR is focused on the labor movement's role in politics. In the last two years, California labor unions have been very effective in the political realm and have begun uniting political action, organizing and contract negotiations into comprehensive campaigns to improve the lives of working people.

The Labor Center has started a series of projects that focus on labor's political action. Working with the ILWU, HERE 2850, SEIU 790, several community groups and religious organizations, a Labor Center team is mapping the potential for economic development at the Port of Oakland. This research will help the unions develop a strategic plan for political action with the Port Commission and with the City of Oakland, an organizing agenda for new work on Port owned land and a multi-union coalition to support labor's agenda in revitalizing Oakland under its new mayor, Jerry Brown.

In Contra Costa County, the Labor Center, the Central Labor Council and two interfaith councils are researching the potential for Living Wage Campaigns and other government initiatives that will impact income inequality and ultimately create a climate for strong union organizing.

The Labor Center has just convened LION, the Labor Immigrant Organizing Network, an alliance of immigrant rights groups and labor union organizers. LION is planning a conference in January to share information and strategies. One potential outcome for LION's work is new legislative initiatives to protect immigrant organizing.

Over the next two months, the California Labor Federation is leading labor's campaign to get Gray Davis elected as governor. If Gray Davis is elected, the legislature and the governor can work together to strengthen California laws to protect the interests of working families. The UCLA and UCB Labor Centers and progressive UC faculty are working with the Cal Fed to develop a comprehensive labor policy agenda for the next four years.

Local and international unions are moving in the political arena on local, state and national campaigns to create economic and social policies that will help all workers. The Labor Center is contributing critical research and education resources to these campaigns. Call the Labor Center for more information about these projects or for ideas about how your union can use research and education to advance its political work.

Kirsten Snow Spalding

Kirsten Snow Spalding, Chair



The Labor Center. Starting left to right: Jacob Ely, Carol Zabin, Rebecca Armstrong, Katie Quan, Asha Goines and Kirsten Spalding

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How to Reach Us

Phone: 510-642-0323

Fax: 510-642-6432

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[http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~iir/
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The Labor Center Reporter welcomes suggestions for future issues as well as submissions. Submissions should be 500 - 1000 words in length.

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Korean Unions Struggle with IMF Reforms

By Elisabeth Lamoureux

Since last December, when Michel Camdessus, managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), landed in Seoul to rescue the South Korean economy, Korean labor has had to rethink its strategies and political alliances.

In December 1997 with its economy (the 11th largest in the world) on the verge of collapse, a humbled Korean government was forced to turn to the IMF for a bailout. Although it was originally thought that Korea would need credit of \$21 billion, it soon appeared that the economy needed the injection of a staggering \$57 billion to cover the exposure of its banks and corporations. As analyzed by the IMF, the problem did not lie with government mismanagement of the economy or with consumers' reckless spending. Instead, the IMF found fault with the banks and the chaebols, the country's dominant conglomerates such as Hyundai and Daewoo who had developed cozy relations that allowed for irresponsible borrowing and spending.

The IMF's intervention has not come cheaply or easily for the Koreans. Profound structural changes of the regimented economy were the IMF's price and conditions. This has meant bankruptcies and unemployment as the government had to agree to a thorough revision of its banking system and of its relations with the chaebols.

The effects of IMF's intervention have not been limited to the economy either. They have also had profound repercussions in politics. Thoroughly dejected with its politicians' compliance with IMF policies, the Korean population which had been expected to elect the government's candidate to the presidency, demonstrated its anger by electing the opposition candidate only two weeks after Camdessus' visit to Seoul. This was a historical event. The election of Kim Dae-jung was not only Korea's first democratic election of an opposition candidate, but it was also the election of the most prominent long-time political dissident to the nation's most powerful post. Indeed, Kim is well known for having spent 16 years of his life either in prison or under house arrest, and for having been the target of three assassination attempts by previous regimes.

The joy of Kims election was short lived, however. Although Kim blamed the chaebols for the financial crisis during his campaign, and derided the three largest chaebols' suggested restructuring plans as "cosmetic plans" with "hollow contents", once elected to the presidency he quickly promised collaboration with the IMF. The dissident Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) accused him of defending the interests of the chaebols rather than protecting labor's interests. Indeed, tension mounted in May to the point where the KCTU refused to participate in tripartite discussions between government, industry and labor representatives, and organized instead a two-day general strike on May 28 and 29. Only the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), the largest of the two confederations of trade unions, but also the one believed to have been created by the Korean CIA in the 1960s, accepted the government's invitation.

The KCTU's disagreement with the new government was over legislation written since the IMF's intervention regarding layoffs, temporary employment, employment security during structural adjustment, working hours, and unemployment relief measures. Further, and of particular concern to unions, were reports of increasing illegal and unfair dismissals, and unpaid and withheld wages during the crisis. Indeed, according to the daily newspaper *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, between December and March, about

Prop. 226 Revisited

Was it the last ravings of an exiting Governor or maybe a slap in the face for California voters? It's not clear. What is clear is that three months after voters rejected Proposition 226, Gov. Pete Wilson issued in September an executive order directing the state Public Employment Relations Board to remind state employees that they do not have to pay for the political expenses of their unions. Proposition 226 was the initiative on the June ballot that would have required unions to receive annual approval from members to spend union dues on political activities. But 53% of voters rejected Prop 226 in the primary. The victory reflected a successful effort by California unions to organize opposition to Prop. 226. The campaign involved television ads, work site meetings and door to door canvassing. In some parts of California, so many members turned out to help that there weren't enough voting precincts to canvas or phones to use, reported the *Los Angeles Times*.

The victory also is a sign of a reinvigorated union movement which *The Sacramento Bee* reports added 20,000 new members in California last year. In spite of Prop 226's defeat at the polls, Wilson ordered the state government to comply with the spirit of the initiative. His directive suggests that many people do not want to see a stronger labor movement. They will try to imply that unions are "special interests," spending dues on issues that workers have no control over. The reinvigorated union movement is proving this wrong. Today's unions represent workers issues more than ever; they are democratic organizations. When unions keep members informed and when rank and file members become actively involved in their organizations, there is little reason for workers to think their unions are not acting with their own best interests in mind. So by organizing and continuing to build more democratic unions, workers can counter the next effort like Prop. 226 just as they did in June. Through such efforts, workers can explain to their fellow members that a union voice is their voice.

-G. Guthey

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City (CA) Firefighters Association, IAFF Local 1270. As a public sector labor union, we faced many of the challenges confronting public sector workers in the 1990s, including wage stagnation, deteriorating equipment, inadequate staffing and a growing geographic response areas. Sometimes one of our firefighting vehicles would simply fail to make it down the ramp of the fire station, while the fire administration steadily acquired a fleet of sparkling Crown Victoria sedans. Our union, established in the 1960s, was focused on these and other daily struggles with the city administration and was embroiled in internal racial strife; we were not involved with other labor unions or community groups and we did not belong to the Central Labor Council or California Labor Federation.

Early Social Participation with Citizens in Action

Over the course of four years, the union became an active partner in social change efforts both in the violence-torn streets of the city's east side and in the life of the California labor movement. Following a year of particularly intense youth violence in Salinas, including fire bombings and drive-by killings, a community group calling itself Citizens in Action (lead by parents of young people killed in the violence) asked for financial and political support from our union. To start, they wanted to build an alternative activity for Halloween night, which in previous years had ended with several young Latinos dead. For our membership, the connection with an east side organization was a first, but it was also natural; after all, our firefighters and paramedics witnessed the effects of the violence first hand week after week. Leadership within the local emerged from Latino firefighters, particularly Art Berlanga, and our affiliation with Citizens in Action eventually included donations of funds and participation by off-duty firefighters in the group's events. In my view, this first project on youth violence was an opening to political participation by the union. It was a short step from here to becoming involved with the UFW and other labor and social issues.

IAFF Local 1270 and the United Farm Workers

Several leaders within the local believed that supporting the UFW was an obvious extension of our work with Citizens in Action. We argued that the UFW, by addressing wages, working

conditions and power in the fields, was the best weapon against poverty, which we held stood at the roots of the violence we witnessed each shift. Connecting labor rights and poverty resonated with the otherwise conservative membership, which had not to the best of our recollection ever passed a politically-oriented resolution or taken action for another organization. The body ultimately supported a medical support project staffed by our union for an upcoming UFW march in Salinas in which 20,000 people were expected. The endorsement included funding a firefighter union banner and a \$500.00 check to the UFW. Again, leadership emerged from the union, as several Latino brothers recalled their own experiences in the fields and those of their parents.

Over 20 firefighters volunteered for duty as Medicos with the Salinas Unity March, and the Salinas Fire Department, at the request of the union, donated use of portable radios and basic life equipment. For the first time in the history of the UFW, a 15' banner with the words "Salinas Firefighters, IAFF Local 1270" flew near the head of the

march. Union firefighters wearing T-shirts emblazoned with a red cross and the word "Medico" circulated on bicycles and walked the route with the marchers. Only a few headaches and one hyperventilation case were treated during the event, but Arturo Rodriguez, president of the UFW, would later write to IAFF president Al Whitehead, saying the local's action "...was not only a show of solidarity between our unions, but it is also an example of a union taking the initiative to further the labor movement of this country which is driven by these acts of brotherhood, as well as a show of support for the farm workers which live in your area and all over this country". Three months later, on May 29, 1996, in the Cesar Chavez library located only blocks from Salinas Fire Station 4, the UFW signed a first contract with the Bruce Church lettuce company.



Salinas firefighters were joined by firefighters from San Jose, Detroit, Los Angeles, Manchester, and the Calif. Dept. of Forestry in providing medical support for the national march with the UFW in Watsonville CA. (April,

1996). The local continued to provide medical support at other UFW events, including a massive national march in April, 1996, in Watsonville, where 30,000 unionists from across the U.S. joined the UFW in a demand for labor rights in the strawberry fields. All available Salinas firefighters at the march were busy staffing medical units, so the local's banner was carried by brother firefighters from Los Angeles, San Jose, Detroit and Manchester, who had heard of the local's

support for the farm workers which live in your area and all over this country". Three months later, on May 29, 1996, in the Cesar Chavez library located only blocks from Salinas Fire Station 4, the UFW signed a first contract with the Bruce Church lettuce company.

involvement with the UFW through the California Professional Firefighters state convention.

Several other advancements were made during this period of political opening in the union, including unanimous endorsement and funding for California's single payer health care initiative and participation in SEIU Local 250's March for Health Care in San Francisco. The local has now successfully qualified a binding arbitration initiative for the November, 1998 ballot.

Lessons Learned

The actions of IAFF Local 1270 pale when compared to those of other unions across California and the U.S. They demonstrate, however, a process which moved a group of fairly conservative individuals to think in terms of the larger labor movement and to act on those thoughts in a public forum. Several points stood out during this process:

- 1) Political participation which advances social justice but does not immediately benefit the membership can only be attempted when the bread-and-butter issues of the union are given at least equal attention. Without the proper handling of grievances, contract campaigns, health and safety problems etc., political action will come to represent nothing more than an attempt by the leadership to use union resources for a personal agenda.
- 2) As Saul Alinsky advised in *Rules for Radicals*, the first steps toward social action in a union must be familiar and safe and without risk of failure or embarrassment, such as the youth violence project described above. Building familiarity into the action will help assure success. For example, in moving from the youth project into a more controversial public action with the UFW, some Salinas firefighters felt more at ease as a result of their role in medical support. This was familiar territory in an otherwise very unfamiliar setting, and it doubled the number of firefighters who chose to par-

ticipate, many of whom had previously never participated in a public protest. Doing everything possible to succeed in these early events will lay the groundwork for continued and escalated public participation by the membership.

- 3) With a cadre of members who are inspired to engage in social action, nearly anything is possible. Inspiring that group means assuring their involvement in decision-making and leadership. Without such a group, the union's social action agenda will soon be viewed as the yammering of a few cranky individuals.
- 4) Finally, rhetoric about class solidarity etc. is so foreign to some union members that it is alienating. It's a non-starter and should be avoided in favor of concrete stories about people's lives.

The things we want - the right to organize and strike, universal access to quality health care, an end to corporate abuse of trade and politics, a fully-functional public sector, a safe work place and a clean environment and more time for our families and communities - these things will never be accomplished through "bread-and butter" unionism alone. Learning how to successfully push our members toward social action in a culture that discourages collective thinking is a critical step toward building a labor movement that is truly a social movement.

Connecting labor rights and poverty resonated with the otherwise conservative membership...

Mike Wilson is now a doctoral student studying worker health and safety at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health under a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). He can be reached at mpwilson@uclink4.berkeley.edu or (408) 426-6659.

At a glance...

Political Action Committees (PACs)
Contributions to Federal Candidates,
1997-1998.

Based on data released by the Federal Election Commission, Sept 1, 1998.

Compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics. <http://crp.org>

Corporate and Business PACs.

Total contributions = \$91,690,093.00

Total contributions to Democratic Party = \$31,922,388.00

Total contributions to Republican Party = \$59,747,820.00

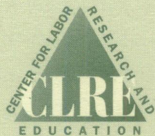
Organized Labor PACs.

Total contributions = \$29,522,306.00

Total contributions to Democratic Party = \$26,621,941.00

Total contributions to Republican Party = \$2,834,865.00

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Labor Center Calendar

Bay Area Labor Studies Seminars:

October 19, 4:30

Paul Robeson Centennial Lecture

October 22, 4:00

Defending Labor Rights in the Global Economy

October 29, 4 – 6 PM

Community Based Labor Organizing Strategies

November 19, 4 – 6 PM

Changing Unions to Organize

December 10, 4 – 6 PM

Analysis of 1998 Elections

January 28, 4 – 6 PM

New Forms and New Faces in Union Transformation

Labor Center Conferences and Retreats

January 23, 1998

Organizing Immigrant Workers: Strategies and Tactics for Union Organizers

February 11 – 12, 1998

Building and Construction Trades Organizer's Retreat

For more information on any of these programs please call Jacob Ely at (510) 642-0323 or email at jaely@uclink4.berkeley.edu

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improve dramatically. If you do it well you'll pay only a fraction of what a massive untargeted campaign would cost. This applies to a volunteer based door to door campaign as much as it does a massive advertising blitz. Here are a few suggestions to help local organizers focus resources and make the most of their members' dedicated participation.

Running the Numbers

To many people 'running the numbers' means analyzing previous elections for the same office. But all elections involve voting and it is voting behavior that the campaign manager must understand. The first step is to analyze voting patterns established in every individual election and in every precinct of your campaign's district during the past 4-6 years. This includes the full gamut from US Senate elections to city council races. All of these provide information about voting habits, but if the election results are more than six years old they can confuse your view of voting behavior.

The county Registrar of Voters has everything you need for a comprehensive analysis: vote tabulations for every precinct and every election during the past six years, plus information about the total number of eligible voters in each precinct and for each election. Some Registrars will resist giving you the data at first, but the information is public and, with persistence, I have never had difficulty getting the data. The local party chairman should also have access to this information should you encounter problems. If the registrar is reluctant, be friendly; a bright smile and a volunteered computer disk can get you the results in electronic form, saving you several hours of tedious data entry.

Once you have collected the information, compile it in a good computer spreadsheet where each row represents vote tallies for one precinct and each column is that precinct's democratic or republican vote for a single election. Using the basic vote tallies you can then calculate the percentage of the vote received by each candidate overall and in each voting precinct.

Step 1: Compiling the Received Vote

$$(\text{Votes Received})/(\text{Total Votes Possible}) \times 100 = \% \text{ of Vote Received}$$

Now look through your results to exclude all non-competitive elections where the winning candidate received more than 60% of all votes cast in the entire district. Sometimes a region is so politically homogeneous that the 60% rule excludes too many elections. If necessary, expand your parameters to include all races where the winner received less than 65% of the vote. (If your candidate's party never received more than 40% of the vote, go home. It's not worth the effort to campaign.) You should exclude the data from elections where the winning candidate won more than 60% or 65% of the vote because these elections are 'blow outs'. They should be entirely deleted from the spreadsheet.

Next, assuming that your race will not include a strong third party candidate, exclude all elections in which a third party candidate received more than 5% of the vote. Also exclude all non-partisan races, unless your own race is non-partisan. This should leave a sizable number of races for analysis. Using the results of all remaining races, subtract the minimum Democratic percentage of the vote in any election or year from the maximum Democratic percentage in any election or year. This difference gives you the "Gross Swing Vote". (I will assume, for the ease of presentation, that the labor candidate is running as a Democrat.) Do this for every individual precinct. Most major spreadsheet programs allow you to build a formula which calculates columns. Use this feature or you could spend days calculating and rechecking the results.

Step 2: Gross Swing Vote

$$(\text{Minimum Democratic } \%) - (\text{Maximum Democratic } \%) = \text{Gross Swing Vote}$$

Look at the Gross Swing Vote for every different election by precinct. Is either the maximum or minimum Democratic percentage extraordinary for that precinct? Sometimes a candidate is well known in one neighborhood and wins an extraordinarily high percentage there. If a candidate won 10% more votes in a precinct than any candidates in other elections, exclude that precinct's result and calculate the Swing Vote, as discussed below, based on the next highest election percentage.

Congratulations, you have now removed the election results which could distort your analysis. Your data can now help you find precincts with persuadable voters. Persuadable voters swing back and forth between republican and democratic candidates so your calculations begin with the 'Swing Vote'. The 'Swing Vote' is the difference between the average percentage of the top two Democratic elections minus the average percentage of the bottom two, for every precinct.

Step 3: Swing Vote

$$\frac{(\text{Top Election 1} + \text{Top Election 2})/2 - (\text{Bottom Election 1} + \text{Bottom Election 2})/2}{2} = \text{Swing Vote}$$

This formula gives you the "Swing Vote" for each precinct. In simple terms, you have calculated the percentage of people who swing their vote from Republican to Democratic in every precinct. These are the persuadable people for your election.

In most areas a few precincts have a Swing Vote of 2% or 3%. This means that no reasonable amount of campaigning will change the way people there will vote. When it comes to allocating your campaign resources those precincts should have lowest priority. After all, no other competitive campaign has found it possible to win, or to lose, a significant number of votes there!

The 'Swing Vote' is not the full story. You should now calculate the average voter participation in the past two elections for every precinct. (If you are running in a presidential election year use the two previous presidential elections, otherwise use the two previous off year elections.)

Step 4: Voter Participation

$$\frac{(\text{Total Votes Cast})}{(\text{Total Votes Possible})} \times 100 = \text{Voter Participation}$$

This will tell you several important things. For instance, in some precincts only 30% of the registered voters ever vote, if that is a heavily Democratic district and you are working for a Democratic candidate GET OUT THE VOTE. Carry people to the polls if necessary! Where more than 80% of the people reliably vote, the precinct is important to campaign in, but a strong Get Out The Vote effort wastes resources.²

Finally, we can calculate the basic targeting priority behind any election campaign.

Step 5: Targeting Priority

$$(\text{Swing Vote \%}) \times (\text{Voter Participation}) = \text{Targeting Priority}$$

The targeting priority number might look big and complicated; don't worry about it. Just rank all of your precincts by Targeting Priority, from highest to lowest number. This is the order of importance for allocating resources. For example, you might have a Swing Vote Percentage of 17% and a 64% Voter Participation rate: $17 \times 64 = 1088$. Using the same calculation, your other precincts might yield the following results: 50, 40, 1410, and 610. This

Continued on next page

SAVE THE DATE!
JANUARY 23, 1999

Organizing Immigrant Workers: Strategies and Tactics for Union Organizers

A conference sponsored by:
**Labor Immigrant Organizing Network
(LION)**

LION is a newly-formed network of union organizers who are organizing immigrant workers in the San Francisco Bay Area. The group includes organizers with current campaigns involving janitors, warehouse workers, teamsters, farmworkers, garment workers, food workers, service workers and construction trades workers.

LION will share information and strategies. It has already formed a rapid response network to mobilize immediate reaction to immigration-related raids and other issues.

LION was originally convened by the Center for Labor Research and Education (UC Berkeley), and includes other groups which can be resources for immigrant worker organizing such as the Labor Occupational Health Program (UC Berkeley), the Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights, Enlace, the Project for Labor Renewal, and the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute.

For further information, call Jacob Ely at the Labor Center at UC Berkeley, at (510) 642-0323, or email him at jaely@uclink4.berkeley.edu.

"Joe Hill", Continued from previous page.

means the precinct with a Targeting Priority of 1410 deserves more of your resources followed by the precincts with Targeting Priorities of 1088 and 610. Your precincts with Targeting Priorities of 50 and 40 are well down the list. You should concentrate on the first three because, in comparison, the last two precincts do not have as many likely and persuadable voters. It is always dangerous to ignore a precinct entirely, but the numbers should guide your hard campaign choices.³

In simple terms, the targeting priority number tells you which precincts have the highest percentage of persuadable people who actually vote. Sometimes a precinct has a Swing Vote of 25% and a voter participation rate of 30%. This means that your volunteers going door to door will meet persuadable people who vote less often than they would in a district with a Swing Vote of only 10%, but a 90% participation rate. The point of a campaign is to maximize your contacts with likely and persuadable voters and the numbers provide necessary information.

What You Gain

Many people find these calculations daunting. Before you decide to ignore them and just do it the old fashioned way, ask yourself: "Will your campaign have enough money and volunteers to waste them on people who cannot be persuaded?" If the answer is no, swallow your pride and do the calculations. Throughout the campaign whenever you are making the tough choices about allocating resources, remember the numbers and let them guide your tactical choices.

Numbers have limitations. They cannot, for instance, give you a campaign strategy. That will depend on the choices of a campaign manager and different managers will use the data in different ways. The easiest calculation is to estimate the number of precincts your volunteers can canvass during the entire campaign and walk them in reverse order of importance. If you can canvass the top fifteen targeted precincts, walk the fifteenth most important first. Then you will be hitting the persuadable precincts precisely in the final days when voter contact matters most.

You will rarely ignore any precincts entirely, but there is always a walled community somewhere in the district. There the Swing Vote is less than 3%, voter participation runs around 40% and getting your people inside is a pain. Look at the numbers and feel relieved. You can skip it with relative impunity... In fact, you might not even bother sending them any mail. Some people are predictable! Knowing who is and who isn't wins campaigns.

¹ The New Party's 60% success rate in local elections demonstrates this.

² Be careful, voter registration data is often outdated. It may appear that voter participation is very low in a district because people move in and out of that district on a regular basis. This erroneously inflates the number of registered voters. University towns are notorious for this distortion. If you suspect this problem is serious and inconsistent in your district's precincts use: (Swing Vote Percentage)x (Swing Vote Percentage)x (Voter Participation)=Targeting Priority. This overstates the importance of the 'Swing Vote' and minimizes the distortion caused by bad 'Voter Participation' information. It is still important to include voter participation in your formula because, as a general rule, precincts with high voter turnover are hard to campaign in and usually have low voter turnout even when the voter information is current.

³ You can also convert percentages to decimals, then $.17 \times .64 = .1088$ as long as you ALWAYS convert percents to their decimal equivalent in every precinct calculation, your results will be the same. The rank order and the comparative size, not the absolute Targeting Priority number matters.

Perry Deess is a Research Manager at the University of New Mexico, Institute for Public Policy and President of the political consulting firm, Democratic Decisions.

Organizing in the Real World: Building and Construction Trades Organizers' Lunch

More than 65 organizers from the trades met at Hs. Lordships on Thursday September 17th for a long lunch with Stephen Lerner, Assistant to the President for Organizing for the Building and Construction Trades Department of the AFL-CIO. The Labor Center led small round table discussions on innovative organizing strategies and new campaigns. As organizer Bob Miller from the Operating Engineers put it: "The lunch was great for organizers to get to know one another. I just want to know that if I'm out on a job site, I'll know the other organizers, I'll recognize them and we can call on one another for support." The BCTC Organizers planning committee is working on plans for the next organizers conference at Rancho Murrietta in Sacramento on Feb. 11th and 12th 1999.

Save The Date!

Tempted and Tried: American Labor at a Crossroads

The Identity Crisis of American Labor

American Labor is at a crossroads. In view of the continuing anti-labor sentiment among the American public and the hostility of recent anti-worker administrations to the labor's interests, American workers must begin to understand that political action is the way to economic security. Workers must realize that politics and economics are inseparable—the only way to protect their interests is for them to get involved and to revitalize their unions' ability to promote their interests in the political arena.

In the recent UPS strike, UPS management appealed to the Teamster leadership to "permit" its members to vote on the most recent contract and to permit "their [the company's] people" to return to work demonstrates the dangers of weak political involvement among unions' rank-and-file. Without an organized political voice, fighting for union members and their interests, it is all too easy for companies to divide working people against themselves. And, of course, political action requires money, and the main source of money available to unions is the due of their membership. Because the only way for unions to become politically strong is to embark on aggressive public relations and lobbying campaigns, spending union money on political causes is not only advisable, it is absolutely imperative.

Despite a nationwide effort to stifle unions politically through the referenda like Proposition 226 in California, which would have limited the ways in which unions can use dues for political purposes, workers must realize that they can fight back, setting the terms of the agenda rather than letting government or management do this for them. Unfortunately, many within the movement fail to understand that the only way to achieve lasting economic security is to act as a proactive political player rather than a reactive economic actor. In other words, workers must act politically so that they can prosper economically.

As a result of certain highly publicized strikes, such as the Teamster's victory in the UPS strike, many assume that a newly militant working class is now leading a reaction against some of the right-wing economic gospels of the 1980's and early 1990's. Unfortunately, this impression is misleading. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, while 2.5 million workers en-

gage in strikes in 1970, by 1997 that number had declined to 339,000.¹ Workers must unite and think politically if they are to force management to change its ways on anything more than a local level. That said, strikes are not enough. Labor must begin setting the political agenda within which those strikes are carried out.

Workers traditionally see unions as an economic pressure group whose chief aim is to increase the economic security of its members. Because workers are understandably concerned about wages and working conditions, moreover, they are often reluctant to risk their incomes for seemingly vague, long-term

political ends, and many union members resist the idea that their dues should be sent on political causes at all. The answer to this problem is to incorporate workers' economic concerns within a larger political strategy.

According to Peter D. Hart Research Associates, a full 63% of workers favor their unions' effort to help members get informed about what is going on in Washington, but only 38% support the idea that unions' main goal should be fighting the Republican agenda. The lesson from these statistics is clear. As Hart puts it, "Organized labor must make it clear at every opportunity—to its members and to all working men and women—that it is not just another special interest group, but rather a movement that seeks to empower America's workers."² Rather than formulating the union agenda in partisan terms—endorsing a candidate or fighting the Republicans—both workers and their leaders must promote workers' interests first, endorsing candidates only as a means to this end.

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Lessons of a European Model

As Sidney Verba has pointed out, political organizations can contribute to the political power of the working class through both the effectiveness of the unions as political *organizations* and the increased political mobilization of its members in elections.³ The political organization of unions allows them to sustain their strength through economic downturns, and in many European countries, such as France, Germany, and Sweden, where labor is more politically consolidated, militancy does

not decline during recessions. Because American Labor lacks political coherence, in other words, economic victories tend to be short-lived and vulnerable to weaknesses in the economy.

Continued from previous page

In many European countries, workers generally have an organized political identity. This identity is often, although not always, accompanied by alliances with political parties or coalitions. As Hart points out, workers must understand that political action in this country, whether endorsing candidates or influencing legislation, is a prerequisite to the effective pursuit of workers' economic interests. This is a role that American Labor, since the decline of the IWW and the 1955 AFL-CIO merger, has resisted and at times outright rejected. Broadly speaking, Americans both within and outside of organized labor feel that unions should be representatives of individual economic concerns rather than wielders of political power. If the experiences of European labor unions are any guide, however, it seems that the more *politically* organized a Labor sector, the more effective it is at attaining economic ends as well as molding public conceptions of its role.

The experience of Germany and Sweden are cases in point. The German system has enshrined the position of Labor both at the bargaining table, through industry-wide and centralized wage bargaining, as well as through guaranteeing Labor a place in the corporate decision-making structure. As a result, German workers enjoy some of the highest wages and levels of job security in Europe, even in the face of recent German economic troubles. In Sweden, where Labor's position is even more centralized, union membership borders on 80% and unions play a powerful role in shaping policy through the ruling Social Democratic Party.

While the traditional American hostility to Labor may make such political aspirations seem wildly optimistic, it is undeniable that American Labor, by modeling itself as an organized political actor rather than a mere seeker of wage concessions, can force management and government to take it more seriously. This power need not depend upon levels of union membership, and Labor can be politically strong in a system in which it has been excluded from decision-making, as in France, where the workforce is even less unionized than in the United States. The power of French workers results from their internal cohesion and the willingness if the *entire* movement to take to the streets when their concerns are not addressed. In both Europe and the U.S., whether at the bargaining table or in the streets, political organization means that unions can wield power independently of the decisions of management and government.

American Labor can learn much from their European counterparts. Far from shying away from politics, American workers must unite behind a political strategy if they are to protect their incomes, their families, and their independence. Anti-union laws and policies, such as Reagan's firing of air-traffic controllers,

result because government feels it has nothing to fear from workers. Workers must begin to think politically, and part of this task is to understand that the money they give to their unions will yield greater returns in the future if unions can promote workers' concerns in the political arena. The ability to demand the respect of politicians is in workers' hands.

A Developing Political Strategy?

There are some indications that such a transformation may be beginning. The foundation of the American Labor Party in the summer of 1996, increasingly proactive union campaigning for pro-worker candidates, and the increased importance of issues of wage equity and job security in the American political debate may all be indications that the American labor movement is beginning to define itself more in political terms. However, unions must begin to think beyond mere reflexive support of pro-worker candidates or the establishment of fringe parties. Neither management nor government, both of which tend to ally against workers, are going to do Labor any favors. Labor must begin to lobby politicians in the political mainstream with long-term, strategic aims, as well as short-term tactical goals, promote

longer-term contracts with job security written into them, actively support strikers in other unions, industries, and job sectors, pressure management for a greater voice in the day-to-day running of companies, and organize with more emphasis on long-term political power. Only in this way can the American worker protect his income, his family, and his access to the American dream.

"Organized labor must make it clear at every opportunity-to its members and to all working men and women-that it is not just another special interest group, but rather a movement that seeks to empower America's workers."

-Peter Hart

¹ Jonathan Marshall, "Labor Strikes Are Becoming Rare as Unions Turn Cautious," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 May 1998, B1, B3.

² Peter D. Hart Research Associates, "Giving American Workers a Voice: Ten Rules for Union Political Action," February 1996.

³ See Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady, "The Big Tilt: Participatory Inequality in America," *The American Prospect*, May-June 1997, 79.

Mark Vail is a graduate student in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley.

43.1 percent of all suicide victims had been people who had lost jobs, failed businesses, or suffered from psychological duress caused by the economic crisis. Finally, the KCTU was also at loggerheads with the government over renegotiating the IMF policy package, something which the government persistently refused to do.

Not all in Korea agreed with the KCTU's strategy of calling for strikes during this period of severe financial crisis, and many, although sympathetic to the confederations' message, argued that negotiations between the government and unions ought to wait until economic stability had been restored. Especially worrying, they said, were losses in foreign investment prompted by the low ratings of foreign financial agencies. Korea must improve its image through flexibility in its labor market but also through social stability, they argued, and union demands must wait. The KCTU was not oblivious to these arguments, but its position was that the process of economic restructuring must not be dealt with separately from social inequalities, job security, conditions of work, and unemployment benefits. Echoing the KCTU, the *Hankyoreh Shinmun* also pointed out that while the effects of social inequalities and mass layoffs might be invisible at the moment, they had the potential of becoming quite serious later, when too late.

The KCTU was not able to put forward its arguments for very long. First, the government's reaction to the KCTU's defiance was swift. On May 29, it declared that it would indict 143 KCTU leaders and issued summons against them for interrogation by police. Worried because the KCTU's planned second round general strike was to coincide with

President Kim's visit to the US, the government used threat to pressure the KCTU leadership and local unions into negotiations.

Second, and decisive to the KCTU's final retreat, was the landslide victory by the government in local elections a few days later. With voters demonstrating overwhelming support for the government, the KCTU could not but yield to pressure, and on June 10 it joined the government-organized tripartite commission.

The conclusion drawn by the KCTU from these last few weeks can be grim. The rise to power of labor's former political ally, Kim Dae-jung, has not increased labor's power, quite the contrary it appears, it has weakened the KCTU. Despite a show of public sympathy for the KCTU's resistance to IMF economic plans and its defense of labor rights, the recent local elections reinforced the new government's political legitimacy. At the moment the KCTU can only be heard if it joins government-organized forums thus compromising its most fundamental position: negotiations over job security and over the economic restructuring plans imposed by the IMF. Clearly, feeling betrayed by the former opposition now in power, the KCTU must search for new political allies, but also develop new strategies that will not force it to work within a framework established and controlled by the government.

Elisabeth Lamoureux is a doctoral student in the Department of Geography at The University of California, Berkeley. She is currently in Korea doing field work.

Editor's Update

Elisabeth Lamoureux's article was written early this summer and since that time, legal actions against trade unionists in Korea have been on the rise. According to Yoon Youngmo, International Secretary of the KCTU, in mid-August of this year the KCTU filed a complaint with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) that stated that 57 unionists had been imprisoned in clear violation of their freedom of association rights. Since the complaint was filed another 52 trade unionists have been imprisoned in Korea raising the total trade unionists imprisoned to 109. In addition to the 109 unionists in prison, 34 have been indicted without detention, 8 have been released on bond and 125 have had warrants issued for their arrests. This brings the total of unionists arrested or wanted for arrest to 274 as of Sept. 9, 1998. -J. Ely

If you would like to receive updates on the activities of the KCTU, contact Yoon Youngmo at inter@kctu.org

"At a Glance", continued from page 5

Organized Labor Donations, Detail, 1997-98

Building Trades Unions

Total contributions = \$5,311,290.00

Industrial Unions

Total contributions = \$6,285,520.00

Transportation Unions

Total contributions = \$7,583,440.00

Public Sector Unions

Total contributions = \$7,104,022.00

Misc. Unions

Total contributions = \$3,238,034.00

Editors note:

These figures are only contributions to individual candidates. They do not include soft-money donations.

Unions, Politics and Democracy

The ALRB: A Captured Political Process

by Tamara Kay

The UFW's current struggle involving Coastal Berry Corporation reveals the often hidden relationship between union organizing and political and legal processes. Although the UFW appears to be embroiled in an organizing fight against the strawberry industry, an active player in the growers' anti-union campaign is the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB), whose pro-grower members and staff have thwarted UFW attempts to organize strawberry workers in the Central Valley.

The ALRB's General Counsel turned a blind eye as anti-union workers and foremen launched a violent attack against pro-union workers on July 1. The Coastal Berry Farmworkers Committee, a bogus group consisting of company foremen and drivers, then collected signatures and filed an election petition. Despite UFW protests and evidence that the committee was actually an illegal company union, the ALRB permitted the election (the UFW refused to participate) to go forward and counted the ballots announcing the victory of the company union. Although the UFW immediately filed objections to the election and numerous unfair labor practice charges with the ALRB to get the unfair election set aside, the labor board and its staff has dragged their collective feet investigating the charges. On September 14 a delegation of pro-UFW Coastal Berry Company strawberry workers protested outside the ALRB Regional Office in Salinas demanding that the election be thrown out.

The crisis the UFW currently faces is irrefutably political. The legal process fails to protect the rights of farmworkers because the political system in which that process operates has been captured by anti-labor members and General Counsel appointed to the ALRB by Governor Pete Wilson and his Republican predecessors. The link between certain ALRB members and agribusiness is well documented. Indeed ALRB Chairman Michael Stoker solicited support from agribusiness for his failed Congressional campaign. It remains to be seen whether the UFW, which endorses Gray Davis and has vowed to push for the appointment of new ALRB staff if he is elected, can recapture the ALRB and return it to enforcing the law for farm workers instead of grower interests.

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Center for Labor Research and Education
2521 Channing Way #5555
Berkeley, CA 94720

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