

CHAPTER 15

ORGANIZING THE UNORGANIZABLE

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Globalization is changing the nature of work in California, and nowhere is this more evident than in the manufacturing sector.¹ The ideal of a large, stable factory, where a union contract could ensure a continuing rise in the standard of living of workers, is a thing of the past, and the manufacturing unions are reeling as a result.

In Los Angeles, as a consequence of excellent electoral work and innovative, aggressive organizing, overall union density has climbed over 2 percent in the last four years, from below 18 percent to nearly 21 percent.² However, from 1988 to 1999 union density in the manufacturing sector in California has dropped from 21 percent to 9 percent statewide, and in the Los Angeles area, to 7 percent and dropping.³ Manufacturing unions have lost membership in manufacturing in California, and a number of them have almost completely shifted their organizing emphasis away from their traditional bases in favor of sectors of the economy that they have deemed *unorganizable*.

Much praise and self-congratulation surrounds the labor movement these days. With new national leadership committed to organizing the unorganized, with a remarkable shift in orientation towards immigration policy, with a few outstanding organizing victories, especially the homecare workers campaign, and with the L.A. janitors' strike that brought national and international attention to the growing injustice and inequality in the city, the California labor movement has reason to feel a new optimism. Nevertheless, it should be noted that most of the gains have occurred either in the public sector, where sympathetic government officials can pressure employers to settle, or in the service sector, where unions can be assured that the jobs will not flee the country once they are organized.

The picture is more bleak when we look at the manufacturing sector. California has suffered from major deindustrialization of its heavy industries, including steel, cars and tires, but it has also experienced a reindustrialization in light manufacturing. California, especially Southern California, has become the manufacturing capital of the United States, with more manufacturing jobs than any other state in the union. In 1999, California had 1,922,800 manufacturing workers, making up about 12 percent of civilian employment. While the number of employed manufacturing workers was almost the same as the number in 1983 (1,927,000), its importance in civilian employment dropped from 17 percent. There have been fluctuations in between, but the California manufacturing workforce has hovered around 2,000,000 workers. About one-third of the state's manufacturing workers are located in Los Angeles County, and 40 percent of those are employed in non-durable

manufacturing.

Immigrants and people of color are overrepresented in manufacturing jobs. Using the 1990 Census, and focusing on Los Angeles County, we find that, for all 4.5 million occupations, 55.3 percent of employees were people of color, including Latinos. However, for the 722,383 manufacturing jobs (defined as operators, fabricators and laborers), 79.2 percent were people of color. Looking more specifically at the 378,934 machine operators, assemblers and inspectors, the percentage jumps to 85.3. Latinos made up the largest groups of workers, at 64.5 percent for operators, and 72.7 percent for machine operators. Given that Latinos were 34.6 percent of the Los Angeles workforce, one can see how overrepresented they were in manufacturing--much higher than in services, where they made up 49.7 percent of service industry employees. We assume that many of these workers are immigrants. According to another source, the *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 62 percent of Mexican immigrants and 46 percent of Central American immigrants take manufacturing jobs when arriving in the United States (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1997).

Manufacturing wages lag behind those of most other industries. Based on California EDD statistics, in March 2000, the statewide average weekly earnings for manufacturing workers was \$581.09, in contrast to \$840.38 for construction, \$940.61 for communications and public utilities, and \$662.58 for wholesale trade. Retail trade wages were lower than manufacturing, at \$338.49. While overall, the manufacturing of durable goods earned a higher wage (\$619.66) than non-durable (\$527.47), there was considerable variation within both of these categories. Thus, the lowest durable goods industry, furniture and fixtures, had an average weekly wage of \$452.69, whereas the highest, transportation equipment, averaged \$779.58. In non-durables, the highest paying industry was petroleum and coal products, at \$1,172.94, whereas the lowest was apparel and other textile products, at \$345.82.

As of 1998, there were 57,535 manufacturing establishments in the state of California, of which 56.6 percent employed fewer than 10 workers. Only 3,991 manufacturing establishments (7 percent) employed 100 or more workers. Manufacturing firms may be bigger, on average, than other employers in the state's economy, but they are still overwhelmingly small.

The Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project (LAMAP), developed in the early 1990s, was based on the assumption that manufacturing matters; it is vital to any stable economy. LAMAP's leaders were also cognizant of the fact that immigrant workers predominated in the manufacturing sector, and that they often worked under the most onerous and dangerous conditions (Delgado 2000). A series of articles appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* detailing the large number of industrial accidents, including deaths, among L.A.'s immigrant manufacturing workers (Freed 1993a, b, c). This series was one of the inspirations for LAMAP (to be discussed below).

In this chapter, we consider some possibilities for organizing in this important sector. Unlike the call for *Organizing the unorganized*,¹ put forth by the national AFL-CIO, we are considering the challenge of organizing among those whom some union leaders consider to be *Unorganizable*.² The article is divided into three sections. First, we examine the changing nature of work and some of the challenges these changes pose for organizing. Second, we look more broadly at the challenges faced by the labor movement as a result of these changes. Third, we consider some possibilities for organizing in this difficult-to-organize sector. We define the labor movement to include not only the union movement, but also worker-organizing that occurs outside of the framework of traditional unions.

Globalization and the Changing Nature of Work

By Aglobalization@ we mean the contemporary phase of capitalism that gradually emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, and became full-blown in the 1980s. This phase, which we prefer to term global/flexible capitalism, involves a host of changes, including the deconstruction of the Welfare State, Reaganesque supply-side economics, privatization, lean-and-mean corporations, and, in general, the increased unfettering of market forces. Rather than dwell on all the causes, characteristics, and consequences of these changes, we focus specifically on how they have changed work. Here are some of the changes that have been occurring, with special focus on the low-wage, manufacturing sector.

More and more firms are contracting out segments of their work. They keep the most profitable sectors, and spin off the less profitable ones, engaging in arm's length transactions with their contractors. By contracting out, companies avoid having to maintain a stable workforce through periods of unemployment. Instead, they use contractors and employ workers on an as-needed basis, substantially cutting their costs and increasing their flexibility. Contracting out has created a large number of firms, many of them small, who work on a contingent basis. The employees who work in these factories are thus made into contingent workers because of the character of their employer.

Contracting out can be devastating to unions. First, the contractors are not profit centers, so that a union contract cannot win much for the workers. Second, the competitive nature of contracting means that big companies will favor non-union over union contractors, and will shift production away from any contractor where labor militancy is brewing. Third, workers in contracting shops have little job stability, and their low wages do not allow them to pay full union dues. These factors tend to create a large and growing non-union sector among workers who are employed in contracting establishments. Many U.S. companies have learned that they can break unions by contracting out the work.

Another feature of globalization is offshore production. U.S. companies have been shifting production offshore to sites where labor is considerably cheaper. This has taken two primary forms: direct investment and contracting. In the latter case, externalizing parts of the work has taken an extreme form as the new levels of fragmentation have become worldwide. The manufacturing sector has been especially hard-hit.

The challenge of organizing a particular company's production empire is multiplied enormously when it is spread around the globe. Offshore contracting enables transnational corporations not only to shift production to whatever country offers them the best deal, lowest wages, and most politically controlled workforce, but also to avoid labor trouble in any particular location by shifting to another one. If workers try to organize, they are faced with the threat that their factory will shut down and leave. While this may sometimes be a bluff, it has happened too many times not to carry weight. Thus, workers in a particular locale may win a hard-fought union battle only to find that their jobs have disappeared.

Another feature of offshore production, and of contracting out in general, is secrecy. In the apparel industry, for instance, TNCs typically hide their production sites, claiming that their contractors and sub-contractors are a protected business secret. This means that workers and unions have no idea where their fellow workers are employed, and must engage in significant expenditure of resources just to locate connected factories. Moreover, with flexible production, sites keep changing, so that the information problem is chronic.

Apart from secrecy, the shifting around of production means that the relationship with

particular TNCs is unstable. A particular maquiladora may do work for more than one TNC, and may have continuously changing relationships with those who send it work. This can make it impossible to organize all the workers for one particular TNC, since the workforce keeps shifting depending on where the TNC sends work.

Obviously, not all manufacturing firms are equally mobile. Some industries and industrial sectors are more regionally tied. These less mobile sectors may afford easier organizing opportunities. Nevertheless, the challenge remains: how do we organize in those industries that can flee? Globally mobile industries and sectors are a growing component of the economy. They cannot be set aside as unorganizable.

Along with relocating production, there are other new devices that fragment the firm still further, and externalize the employment relationship. Examples include: the treatment of workers, including industrial homeworkers, as independent contractors; employing temporary and part-time workers who are treated as the employees of the temp agency; increasing the proportion of temporary and part-time workers who have lower wages than regular employees, no benefits, and no claims on the firm. Part-time and contingent workers now account for one-quarter of the U.S. workforce. They typically suffer from low wages and few benefits, reduced employment security, barriers to advancement, and low productivity. They are much less unionized than the rest of the labor force (Carre, duRivage and Tilly 1994).

The changing employment forms have been accompanied by a rise in the number and proportion of workers who are women, people of color, and immigrants, including undocumented immigrants. Marginalized, low-paying jobs tend to be filled by the segment of the population with the least rights.

This creates all kinds of potential conflicts. Old, unionized, often white male workers, find their good jobs evaporating, to be replaced by the more flexible jobs both here and abroad, and there is a tendency to blame the less advantaged workers for their woes. In other words, racism and sexism are promoted under these conditions of shift. Second, the already unionized workers feel little inclination to reach out to the less advantaged workers because they are different, or do not speak the same language. Moreover, the economic gulf between the sectors of the working class makes the prospect of organizing the new entrants appear daunting. Third, union officials tend to be entrenched, and to come from the ranks of the old, mainly white male, membership. They often do not understand the cultures and communities of the newer entrants, and have difficulty representing their interests. Meanwhile, the disadvantaged workers sometimes do not trust the union leaders, and feel that they do not have their interests at heart.

One of the consequences of the above changes is greater employment instability. Many workers in the low-wage sector cannot count on any form of employment stability. Not only do they shift from job to job within a particular industry, but some also shift from one industry to another.⁴

Women move between garment work, domestic service, janitorial services in offices and restaurants, and street vending. Men shift from restaurants to serving as day laborers in construction and other fields, to gardening and micro-entrepreneurial enterprises. These workers have truly been transformed into the ideal capitalist proletariat: unskilled hands that can be moved to whatever job currently needs to be filled. We call them the hyper-proletariat. They may be trained briefly to fill the specific needs of the job, but no serious training is given to enhance their skills. However, the industries that employ them maintain their own coherence, even though the workers themselves have little reason to maintain a commitment to a particular industry.

Thus, at the level of capital, industries such as apparel, shoes, toys, etc. each have their own

competitive structure and their own community of key actors who know each other and form organizations to pursue their collective interests. The floating character of the low-wage segment of these industries, in contrast, is disorganized as far as work is concerned. Of course, they have various forms of community organizations and affiliations, including church memberships, soccer clubs, and clubs of origin. But the fluidity of their work lives makes organizing around the job a temporary activity, at best. As a result, the social structures of community become more important to the individual than the social structures connected with the job.

The Challenge of Organizing in a New World Order

Most U.S. unions are still operating under the assumptions of the Welfare State. They mourn the passing of the so-called golden age of industrial relations in this country, when government, industries and unions all worked in partnership, and seek to reestablish that period. This is why they keep supporting the Democratic Party, hoping against all the evidence that the Party will turn the clock back to a happier era. But as Democratic presidents and governors keep demonstrating, they have no intention of reestablishing the Welfare State. They will not protect unions. They will not rewrite the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) into an effective instrument for protecting the rights of workers to organize. The truth is, a profound change has occurred, and there is no way to turn it around and get back to the Good old days.⁵

We need to develop means for pursuing the struggle for improving conditions for workers that look seriously at capitalism as it actually is, not as we would like it to be. This means accepting the fact that the large plant with a stable workforce is mainly a thing of the past, at least in many sectors of manufacturing. Most private sector workers do not work in such facilities any more. They have a much more tenuous hold on their positions in the workforce. Many workers make such low pay that they live in constant poverty, on the edge of economic disaster. They lack the wherewithal to sustain a long and costly fight against their employer, and they have many other unmet needs. They are the working poor.⁶

The labor movement needs to develop new strategies for organizing and fighting in this changed environment. A great deal of very worthy talking and writing has been done about changing the tactics of organizing, especially among non-traditional workers. These include such things as: employing organizers who speak the language of the workers, developing worker-activists among the union members, developing ties between unions and community organizations, representing and giving political support to the broader concerns of the workers and their communities, developing close relations between workers and organizers through constant house visits, etc. These are all important, and long overdue in many unions. However, they do not address the strategic question of how we can effectively fight against global/flexible capital.

We believe that new models of organizing are called for under these changed conditions. We believe that the old systems of organizing, based on the ability to win a contract in a particular plant, may be obsolete for many hundreds of thousands of workers. If it is tried, they will almost certainly lose the struggle, and their jobs as well. For this reason, we are calling for a complete and open rethinking of the old methods of the labor movement.

This said, we should note that some unions have been very successful in organizing non-traditional workplaces. SEIU has been outstanding in this regard, with its Justice for Janitors campaign, and its ability to organize homecare workers in Los Angeles County (Waldinger et al. 1998). But there have been mitigating circumstances even in these difficult cases. While building owners could shift cleaning contractors, they could not move the buildings themselves, giving a

certain stability to the struggle--in contrast to many manufacturing workers whose factories simply pull up and leave. Similarly, the homecare workers' campaign rested on the union's ability to leverage the state's role in funding this service. Bringing the state into labor struggles is certainly a key possibility, but it is more accessible to certain industries than others. The reality is that the vast majority of low-wage, manufacturing workers have neither advantage. What are they to do to enhance their power? What can the labor movement offer them to help them engage in effective struggle?⁷

Thoughts About New Strategies

As is usually the case, it is much easier to criticize than to come up with good alternatives. Drawing on our own experience, as well as on efforts being made by others around the country, we lay out some possibilities for new strategic approaches. We come to this task with considerable humility, knowing that we do not have the answers to the intense challenges. We are sure that every idea we present here has been already thought of by others. Moreover, there are a million practical problems that can be raised against each of our ideas. Still, we hope to stimulate a discussion that breaks out of the mold of standard ways of thinking about class struggle, and that does not necessarily accept the existing organizational structures. We draw upon our own experience, as well as the experiences of other projects around the country that we have observed. Some of these are not in manufacturing, but may still provide us with valuable lessons for organizing among those workers who are deemed unorganizable.

The primitive ideas we present here are generally consistent with the idea of Asocial movement unionism⁸ (Johnston 1994; Waterman 1998). We support the idea that the labor movement, whatever particular form it takes, needs to be a movement. That is, it needs to mobilize masses of people around a passionate search for social justice. It needs to demand fundamental social change. It needs to be exciting. It needs to be led by its own participants, and not by an outside, middle class leadership.

We begin this discussion by examining three major efforts that have been made to organize immigrant workers, at least partly in the manufacturing sector, namely: the California Immigrant Workers' Association (CIWA), LAMAP, and the Guess campaign, examining briefly the outcomes of the experiments. We then consider two broad approaches to organizing among low-wage, immigrant, manufacturing workers in global/flexible industries: worker-centered organizing based on strong labor-community alliances, and international solidarity work.

The California Immigrant Workers Association (CIWA, AFL-CIO) was a vital component to the success of the Drywallers and American Racing Equipment campaigns. The AFL-CIO in Southern California started it in 1989. It was an experimental project with outreach to Latina/o immigrants. CIWA was staffed by veteran community organizers from the Latina/o community. One AFL-CIO organizer recalled: "These were folks who are seasoned veterans in organizing, speak the language, know the culture, and know the complexities of the immigration laws and the labor movement" (quoted in Milkman and Wong 1998). Its purpose was to link the union movement with the immigrant, primarily Latina/o, communities. CIWA mobilized lawyers to help fight the INS. Unions, and community groups like Orange County-based Hermandad Mexicana National supported the drywallers with donations of food and other necessities. CIWA helped the strikers and their supporters from being intimidated by the numerous arrests and to pull off tactics like blocking the freeway in protest of INS raids. CIWA also played a key role in researching and filing the FLSA lawsuits which were critical to the ultimate victory of the drywallers. In the case of the American

Racing Equipment workers CIWA helped to broaden existing community ties and support, thus greatly contributing to the grassroots immigrant initiated organizing campaign. But despite its success the AFL-CIO leadership opted to terminate CIWA's funding and end the program.

Like CIWA the Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project (LAMAP) developed because the unions were not organizing. LAMAP was the creation of veteran union organizers like Peter Olney.

After the April 1992 uprising in Los Angeles, Olney theorized that unionization could be a vehicle for community economic development. Father Pedro Villarroya, a priest in charge of the Hispanic Mission for the Catholic Archdiocese, commented: "Usually unions organize around an issue, like salary. This [LAMAP] was around giving poor people a place in society" (Gallagher 1998).

Learning from previous organizing projects like the Houston, Texas Project and Silicon Valley's Campaign for Justice, LAMAP was organized around four ideas: 1) unions should not rely on the NLRB, a.k.a. "the graveyard of workers' hopes" (Gallagher 1998); 2) unions should organize whole industries rather than individual shops; 3) organizing campaigns should be multi-union; 4) organizing campaigns had to be grounded in the community. LAMAP leader Peter Olney stated: "People have demonstrated the ability to organize. The question is how do we, the unions, fit in? . . . You can't just send a few people into town; put them up at a motel; collect authorization cards and file for an NLRB election. It's just not working. It's not how the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) happened in the 1930s--unionization came up from the bottom" (Gallagher 1998).

As its organizing target, LAMAP chose the Alameda Corridor. Almost two-thirds of the manufacturing jobs in Los Angeles are located in the 120 square mile corridor that stretches over 20 miles from downtown LA to the port. LAMAP designed organizing projects that were industry-wide *and* multi-union. It also had a community component for developing deep ties with the primarily Latina/o immigrant community, including offering ESL and citizenship classes.

The Department of Urban Planning, working closely with LAMAP, developed research courses to study L.A.'s manufacturing industries. In addition, the Labor Centers at UCLA and Cal-State Dominguez Hills created classes that provided university students with opportunities to work with the immigrant communities and learn about organizing. After graduating from these programs several students became full-time union organizers.

LAMAP needed a number of unions to provide financial support. But, as some organizers believe, unions failed to back LAMAP because it was planned as an independent community project outside of the union movement. Despite high praise from different international unions, and support from John Sweeney, who described LAMAP as a "model" for organizing, LAMAP never secured stable funding from unions and eventually shut down in January 1998.

The Guess campaign was one of the most ambitious efforts to organize in that sector of manufacturing most impacted by globalization and flexible production, namely the apparel industry.

The campaign was begun by the ILGWU, and continued by UNITE after the merger of the ILG with ACTWU. While Guess? Inc. did most of its cutting in-house, virtually all of the sewing was contracted out to about 100 contracting shops, mainly in Southern California, and employing primarily Latino immigrant workers.

The goal of the campaign was to organize Guess's entire production system simultaneously, including the workers in its inside shop and the workers in its contracting empire. The original idea was to hold an organizing strike across the whole system. If Guess tried to shift its production to other contractors, efforts would be made to persuade those contractors to avoid getting involved in a labor dispute on the threat of getting embroiled in it.

The campaign failed for a number of reasons. Guess was extremely anti-union and used its considerable resources to do everything it could to break the union. Unfortunately, the fact that the merger into UNITE overlapped with the campaign, creating some internal turmoil, meant that the union did not give its full commitment to the struggle. As a result, Guess had the time to regroup and was able to shift much of its production to Mexico and elsewhere. Although the campaign leadership knew that Guess could do this, if a successful strike had been held, it was assumed that terms could be set to keep some proportion of the production local.

What the three examples show is the emergence of new strategies that reach out to workers who have traditionally been unorganized. These new strategies include innovative partnerships and ambitious goals. Unfortunately, each strategy ran into difficulties, including an inability to win long term support. To make these strategies viable, there must be real commitment and financial support. Moreover, these strategies need to be complimented with other approaches.

Worker-Centered versus Workplace Centered Organizing

Given the ability of capital, especially in the manufacturing sector, to shift location through outsourcing, the fight to win a contract with a particular employer at a particular worksite seems almost futile. You may win a skirmish in the battle, but lose the war as the major (sometimes indirect) employer shifts production away from that site.

An alternative approach is to organize workers regardless of where they are employed, instead of organizing a particular firm, waging a campaign against that firm, and trying to win a contract for the employees of that particular employer.⁸ How, then, might one organize? How would one confront capital? And how would one win real gains? A few possibilities suggest themselves:

The first possibility is simultaneous multi-employer organizing. This method of organizing is about the creation of collective worker action as opposed to getting a collective bargaining agreement. It highlights the concept of organizing workers, as opposed to work places. This approach is particularly suited to those workers who have been deemed Aprivate contractors,@ contingent workers or employees of very small firms. The Solidarity union in Baltimore is an excellent example of this type of organizing (Fine 1998). The union fought for the passage of a Living Wage Ordinance in Baltimore, and as a consequence, hundreds of employees from dozens of very small firms got a raise. While most of these workers would be considered service workers, Solidarity's model of organizing suggests a strategy that could be useful for flexible manufacturing workers as well.

The workers involved in the project were dispersed throughout the low-income neighborhoods of the city. A partnership was created between a community-based organization, called B.U.I.L.D. (Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development), and AFSCME. The result was an organization, called Solidarity, that represented a community-union coalition. The workers were organized where they lived, in their communities. Because of the large number of small firms, collective bargaining in the traditional sense was not feasible. What AFSCME and B.U.I.L.D. did, instead, was to persuade the employers to pay into a health and welfare fund that provides the workers with health and dental plans. The workers pay dues to Solidarity, which splits the income between AFSCME and B.U.I.L.D. Solidarity represents the workers as if they had collective bargaining rights and, because of their collective actions, the workers have power to enforce a grievance procedure and other conditions of employment like health and safety.

Another possibility is organizing the workers in a particular industry, or industrial sector. The

approach here, which borrows from the experience of the CIO, involves attempting to organize all the workers in a particular industry, or sector of an industry, at the same time, regardless of where they are employed. For example, within the apparel industry, one might define a distinctive sector, like swimwear, or dresses. One would then try to organize all of the employees within this sector together, as a unit.

Bargaining would not occur with individual employers, but with an organization of all the employers in that sector, who would band together to deal with the organized workers. Ideally, large numbers of workers would sign up with the union, showing the potential strength of a united group of workers. The workers would engage in protests, and possibly strikes, to express their collective power, in order to bring the employers=organization to the bargaining table.⁹

One advantage of this approach is that employers would find it harder to engage in retaliations against activists, especially in the form of shifting production away from their plant. On the other hand, there is always the danger that the entire sector will decide to leave the region.

The method of organizing, under this model, would involve the recruitment of union members in a variety of settings: places of work, neighborhoods, churches, through radio and TV, and so forth. The workers so recruited would be full-fledged union members--not associate members, or non-members until they won a contract. (Associate membership programs create unequal strata within unions, and leave the most disadvantaged workers without power in their own union.) The union would hold regular meetings at convenient locales--Workers=Centers--where popular education, leadership training, and direct action plans would be developed (Fine 1998; Hermanson 1993; Ness 1998).¹⁰ Each Center would send representatives to a coordinating body that would make decisions for the union as a whole.

Ideally, the Centers would help workers develop committees in each factory, so that all workers in that sector would know about the union, and would be encouraged to join. These factory cells would become important units in the union, collecting and sharing information about working conditions, and serving to enforce any contract that was signed. The union, so constructed, could also engage with government agencies on various issues, like the setting and enforcement of labor standards in the industry.

One attempt to develop these ideas in practice is the effort to build a Garment Workers=Center in El Monte. This project is very much an experiment in its first stages. Under the aegis of California-based Sweatshop Watch, a coalition of community groups, the Center aims at providing all garment workers in El Monte with a place where they can come together, receive help with wage claims, participate in political education, and engage in low risk political action. El Monte was chosen for a number of reasons: It has historical significance as the location of the infamous Thai slave-shop. The organizers also thought it was better to start with a smaller concentration of garment factories than the downtown garment district, and we believe that, in El Monte, workers are more likely to live nearer their places of employment. If we succeed in establishing a viable Center there, we may try other, more ambitious locations. El Monte was also selected because an important goal of the Center is to build multiethnic coalitions between Latino and Asian workers. El Monte has many factories that clearly employ workers of both major ethnic groups.

Another goal of the Center is to work closely with the growing student anti-sweatshop movement (discussed below), in order to build a worker-student coalition. We believe that students can bring good energy to the Center, and can perform multiple volunteer tasks. It is hoped that relations can be developed with nearby colleges and universities so that students can earn college credit for spending time helping to develop the Center.

Ultimately, the Center must develop a campaign in which workers struggle for concrete gains. The exact form of such a campaign is not yet clear, and would have to be developed with the membership.

Another worker-centered approach is to organize where workers live, regardless of where they work. One could define a neighborhood, like Pico Union in Los Angeles, and attempt to develop a union for all the people who live there, regardless of the industry in which they work. The ideal circumstance would be one in which work and residence are related, with the residents of a particular neighborhood tending to work in on or near that neighborhood.

This approach has been tried in various places, like San Jose, and near the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). Organizers have gone door to door in an attempt to organize entire neighborhoods. Workers in a neighborhood like Pico Union near downtown Los Angeles, for example, may for the most part be employed in the major low-wage industries of Los Angeles--janitorial services, restaurants, garment factories and other light manufacturing.

Who would be the target of organizing? With whom would the union bargain and sign a contract? These questions are difficult and depend, to a large extent, on the coherence of the neighborhood. Perhaps a particular type of industrial employment would predominate, suggesting a kick-off campaign.

The advantage of such an approach is that the neighborhood could organize around multiple issues: housing, economic development, schools, child care, health care, transportation, and police abuse, as well as wages and working conditions. The neighborhood union would thus speak to the multiple social, economic and political needs and demands of the neighborhood.

UNITE is attempting to carry out a geographic-based organizing campaign in Southern Florida. This campaign involves organizing in multiple sectors almost simultaneously. In order for unions to be successful in this type of campaign they need to be community-based and able to work out the various jurisdictional issues they will encounter as they cross into the jurisdiction of other unions. Or, such a campaign would require a high level of coordination between various unions.¹¹

In Los Angeles, unions have targeted key areas with high immigrant populations and have combined aggressive, political efforts (e.g., get out the vote campaigns and particular candidate elections) with highly visible and militant union campaigns, like Justice for Janitors. Their purpose has been to create a power-base for traditional unions within the immigrant communities, linking broader political issues with the bread and butter concerns of workers. The big turnout of a largely immigrant population (estimated at 20,000) at an AFL-CIO forum on immigrant rights, June 10, 2000, indicates the growing attention that unions are giving to linking community-based organizations (such as the Industrial Areas Foundation) with the union movement. Unfortunately, the driving force behind this initiative has been limited to unions based in services and the public sector.

To sum up, the old union jurisdictions no longer function well, and old systems of membership tend to exclude low wage, immigrant workers. We want to break down these barriers by breaking out of old organizational forms. One major goal is that union membership should be open to anyone who falls within the designated boundaries, however defined. They should be full-fledged members, and have the power to run their union. They would not lose membership if they lose their jobs. They would be building an inclusive movement that is not defined by capital mobility or decentralization. Thus, temp workers would be as able to join the union just like permanently employed workers.

International Solidarity Work

As is widely recognized, globalized capitalism demands a global response from workers. If ever the principle *Workers of the world unite* was true, it is true today. But if it is difficult to organize local workers who are employed in the globalized manufacturing sector, how much more difficult to organize across borders and among even more oppressed workers in the global south. Still, some promising efforts are occurring in this arena, most notably, the development of an anti-sweatshop movement in the United States and other countries.

The anti-sweatshop movement aims to mobilize constituencies in the United States, including students, consumers, and religious organizations, in an expression of outrage over the effects of globalization and flexible production on workers and their families around the world, and to demand that these industries take responsibility and change their practices. Numerous organizations have formed around these issues, and are working with unions and NGOs in southern countries.

Although the movement is not in itself focused on organizing workers into unions, it strongly supports the rights of workers to organized self-representation. It exposes illegal and immoral conditions, including efforts by companies to break unions, or to cut and run when violations are found in their contractors' factories. An important goal of the anti-sweatshop movement is to put a halt to the *Race to the Bottom* by U.S. transnational corporation that scours the world for the cheapest, most politically dominated workers. The movement wants to help these workers protect themselves by ensuring that their exploitation does not occur in silence.

One of the strengths of the anti-sweatshop movement is that it can cast unfavorable publicity on brands that live by their image and spend millions of dollars promoting it. Firms recognize their vulnerability, and have been scurrying to find ways to avoid being caught. Nevertheless, they have already been forced to make some changes, including developing Codes of Conduct, setting up monitoring systems, and joining monitoring organizations (including one set up by the federal government--the Fair Labor Association). Much of this may be symbolic, but a true gain was made with pressures by the student movement to get licensees in the collegiate apparel sector to disclose where their factories are located. Until very recently, these companies had claimed that they could not possibly reveal their factory locations because the information was a protected business secret. But disclosure has been won, opening the possibility to various forms of cross-border organizing drives with strong solidarity actions to support them.

The development by the AFL-CIO of the Solidarity Center, including efforts to get rid of the old Cold War leadership,¹² opens up new possibilities for coordination between the union movement and the other solidarity organizations that have emerged. For example, disclosure of factory locations compelled by the student movement may also be of use to labor organizers both at the local and the international level. New organizing drives may be developed that can, in turn, call on students and other anti-sweatshop activists for support.

The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor (LACFL) has allocated 30 percent of its resources to organizing. Its main focus continues to be electoral politics and deepening its ties with the Democratic Party, but it has staffed an Organizing Department and hired a strategic researcher. Some of the key people in LAMAP are now employed at the LACFL. The LACFL is the hub of major organizing campaigns in industries that employ immigrants, including drives to organize Catholic Health Care West (SEIU), L.A. International Airport (HERE and SEIU), and probably the biggest campaign in a generation, the drive to organize 74,000 homecare workers (SEIU). However, LACFL's strategic organizing focus is on industries that cannot run away, i.e., public sector or

service industries. The ability of some manufacturing enterprises to run away scares the hell out of unions. Where does this leave the hundreds of thousands of workers employed in these industries? Historical examples like CIWA and LAMAP tell us that organizers will recognize the vacuum and try to fill it. Across California immigrant workers and their advocates are forming their own social movements. Asian Immigrant Women's Advocates (AIWA) in the north, the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA) in the south, the Pilipino Workers Center (PWC), the Association of Latin American Gardeners of Los Angeles (ALAGLA), the Day Laborer Organizing Project and the Domestic Workers Project (both of CHIRLA), are parts of this social movement. All of these organizations are dedicated to the empowerment of immigrant workers in some of the most exploited occupations in the United States. For instance, hundreds of day laborers have mobilized against anti-immigrant police harassment and local laws that limit their ability to solicit work. As Victor Narro of CHIRLA has said: "Immigrant workers are creating their own movement and creating their own union."⁶ But even among these brave efforts, manufacturing is conspicuously absent.

Discussion

The interests and goals of the emerging immigrant worker social movement center on gaining access to resources and overcoming the barriers created by the dominant Anglo American population. These barriers, which include the passage in California of Propositions 187, 209 and 227, prevent access for immigrants, primarily Latinos/as, but also Asians, on the basis of class, language, race, citizenship status and immigration status. Consequently, one of the primary struggles of California's immigrants is political in nature.

The union movement, on the other hand, is driven by a different set of interests. The primary concern of traditional U.S. unions is pursuing the economic interests of union members and the preservation of their organizations. Within the union movement, Anglo dominance is also a barrier to full access by immigrants. Organizing large numbers of immigrants can change the demographics and impact the culture and governance of unions.

This point was made apparent after the successful Justice for Janitors organizing campaign in Los Angeles. Immigrants, many of whom were politicized in the struggles for democracy in Latin America, moved rapidly to replace the incumbent leadership. They won a majority of the seats on the union executive board. A power struggle ensued between the majority of the board and the incumbent leadership. After attempts at mediation, the International SEIU opted to place the local union into trusteeship and assume control. Eventually, the janitorial section of the local union was incorporated into a state-wide janitor's union under SEIU. Some local union leaders in the LA area are very aware of this case and voice their fear of similar incidents occurring in their local unions. Some have even used it as a reason for not making organizing their main goal.

However, common economic ground exists between the immigrants' need for economic survival and the unions' need for new members. The long-term survival of a local union could represent a stronger institutional interest than the survival of a particular leader. The membership of unions, therefore, has to be educated about the long-term benefits of organizing.

As the drywallers and American Racing Equipment campaigns taught us, organizing immigrant workers to serve the institutional interests of unions will not sustain the kind of campaign that is necessary to win. Viewing immigrant workers in this way limits the strategies that can be used to organize. This narrow view neglects the political needs of immigrant workers, which distinguishes most union organizing from the community-based organizing strategies.

Social movement unionism (SMU) presents the possibility for developing a relationship

between the union movement and other social forces (e.g., movements of minorities, immigrants and women), and between issues of shop floor democracy and internationalism (Waterman 1993). Specifically, SMU sees no boundary between the democratic political issues in the community and the struggle for democratic rights on the shop floor. It sees unions and communities creating strategic plans together. And it stresses the importance of a clearly articulated, independent political agenda. This agenda is designed to bring the various communities and social movements together in opposition to neo-liberal policies like deregulation of worker rights, the privatization of the public sector, the lowering of the economic floor by criminalizing immigrants and people of color, and destroying the welfare safety net and unions.

Conclusion

By themselves neither the union movement nor the immigrant organizing movement has the capacity to develop successful organizing strategies. Without a strong push from within the union movement to transform to SMU, and strong organizing outside of the union movement, i.e., independent immigrant worker organizing, it is unlikely that the union movement will organize in such a way as to win back what they have lost in the manufacturing sector in California. Concretely, organizing models that are community-based, geographic, industry-wide and worker-centered are models of organizing that were tested by the Industrial Workers of the World and the Congress of Industrial Organizations during the early part of the twentieth century. These strategies, adapted to the changing conditions of today, may help to show the labor and the union movement that the manufacturing sector can be organized on a scale that would strengthen the growing workers= movement against neoliberalism and global capital around the world.

Obviously, there are many stumbling blocks that face international organizing efforts, let alone support efforts by worker advocates in California and across the country. Problems of protecting local jobs, while not hurting workers= opportunities in other countries, constitute a formidable challenge. Nevertheless, working together, workers of the world can strive to find solutions that avoid pitting workers against each other, and that serve the best interests of all.

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Endnotes

¹This article is a first statement in a larger project in which we plan to examine the topics raised here in greater depth.

²*California Statistical Abstract* 1988 and Current Population Survey data contained in *Union Membership and Earnings Data Book*, BNA 1998. The last calculation of union density performed by the Department of Industrial Relations of the State of California was done in 1988.

³*Ibid.* Due to the restructuring of the aerospace industry in Southern California, union density is expected to decline even more in next few years.

⁴We are not able to quantify the extent of inter-industry movement among low-wage workers, and base this statement on anecdotal evidence. We hope to be able to investigate the proposition more systematically at a later date.

⁵We have considerable skepticism about how good the good old days were. The golden age of U.S. labor relations was characterized by business unionism, as well as racism and sexism in the union movement. The accord between capital, labor and the state may have enabled many white families to move into the middle class, but most people of color were excluded from it, and white women were often relegated to the role of housewives.

⁶California, in general, and Los Angeles, in particular, appear to be leading the nation in terms of the growth of the working poor. These are full-time workers who nevertheless make wages that are well below the poverty line. The Aliving wage® movement, which is gaining support in California, has sought to bring the families of the working poor up to the official poverty line--a sign of how low wages have sunk for this segment of the population.

⁷Some manufacturing unions in Los Angeles are trying to cope with this situation. The IAM, for example, following on the successful campaign at American Racing Equipment, is trying to organize the wheel industry. Given the size of the need, however, these appear to be small if valiant efforts.

⁸Fine (1998) develops this idea, calling it Alabor market unionism.® The goal is to take wages out of competition across a city or industry. She points out that both craft and industrial unionism went beyond the worksite and firm levels. As she puts it:

As relationships between workers and firms become more temporary and workers are less and less able to rely on a single employer to supply training, benefits, and upward mobility, unions may come to serve this function. In fact, unions could become the only fixed point in the changing universe of work. But unions cannot organize, bargain, and provide benefits one firm at a time. They have to target an entire labor market (p. 147).

⁹This was the way the fragmented apparel industry was organized in the East in the first place. A series of general strikes, starting in 1909, forced the various sectors of the industry to deal with the union across the entire sector. Difficult though these struggles were, however, they did not face the threat of industry flight offshore.

¹⁰Before it merged to form UNITE in 1995, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) ran a number of these Centers, including one in Los Angeles. Unfortunately, the L.A. Center suffered from changing staff at the top, and inconsistent support for the concept from the union's top leadership. We do not have an assessment of the successes and failures of the New York Centers, but believe that the concept has never been given a full and fair trial in Los Angeles. Some Centers are run by community groups rather than union, e.g., the Workplace Project on Long Island.

¹¹ The concept of a joint multi-union organizing project is a bold idea, but not new. It has been recently attempted, e.g., Texas, California and Wisconsin. In past years AOperation Dixie® was a multi-union project. Leadership, coordination, commitment and allocation of resources between unions often become problems in this type of project.

¹² The dominant culture of the U.S. union movement was, to a large degree, framed during the McCarthy era. The emergence of this culture was best exemplified by the purging of the eleven Ared unions® in 1949 by the CIO. The fear of communists infiltrating the AFL-CIO was a major concern of AFL-CIO President George Meany. Anti-communism created anti-communist clauses in the constitutions and by-laws of U.S. unions and the AFL-CIO. Prohibiting any non-AFL-CIO unions or groups from becoming members of local AFL-CIO Central Labor Councils further strengthened this.

The field representatives of the AFL-CIO enforced these provisions. Thus, the union movement increased the distance between the union movement and other social movements that should have been close allies, e.g., the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement. The distance between community unions and groups is an obstacle to the community unionism that is being advocated by the national AFL-CIO in its Union City® program. This gap, today, has an adverse effect on the ability of the union movement to effectively organize minority and immigrant workers and to move beyond its own white chauvinism.