

Preface and Acknowledgments

IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, AS UNIONS IN THE UNITED STATES find themselves increasingly overwhelmed by adversity—beleaguered by a relentlessly inhospitable political environment and representing an ever-shrinking share of the workforce—the California labor movement appears surprisingly robust. Union membership and density have inched upward in the state over recent years, even as they continue to decline nationally. In addition to its successes in directly recruiting new members, California labor has helped to promote a range of innovative legislative initiatives at both the state and the local level that indirectly facilitate organizing. Changing state law to establish a public authority as the employer of record for homecare workers, for example, paved the way to unionizing tens of thousands of employees over the course of the 1990s. California also passed the nation’s first effective state neutrality law in 2000, which prohibits employers from using state funds for anti-union—or pro-union—activities. Labor’s efforts have also helped to secure passage of local labor peace ordinances and “living wage” laws up and down the state. Although, like their national counterparts, California unions continue to face many daunting challenges, these recent achievements offer a basis for optimism and perhaps even a model for others to emulate.

Enemies of organized labor often cast it as a “special interest” with political clout disproportionate to its membership, but in many instances the California labor movement exerts its considerable influence in Sacramento on behalf of not only its own members but also the state’s vast non-union workforce, often with impressive results. The most important recent example is the 2002 California paid family leave law, the first of its kind in the United States, which will provide leave with pay for new parents and workers caring for seriously ill family members starting in 2004. More generally, as corporate restructuring and neoliberal government policies steadily widen the gulf between rich and poor—a problem even more pronounced in the state than in the nation—the California labor movement is the one voice consistently defending the economically disenfranchised. Such leadership on fundamental issues of economic and social justice is all too often lacking in other quarters. After the long economic boom of the late 1990s gave way to deep recession and fiscal crisis, effectively addressing such issues became far more difficult politically. Yet,

growing economic inequality and social justice issues are likely to remain at the forefront of public concern, and labor will continue to lead efforts to craft legislation and public policy in this area.

This year's *State of California Labor* is an effort to illuminate labor's recent achievements in California, as well as the broader political and economic context in which they are situated. The volume opens with a chapter on union membership in California, drawing on the California Union Census (CUC), a new source of data from a project launched by the Institute for Labor and Employment (ILE) shortly after its establishment in 2000. In partnership with the California Department of Industrial Relations (DIR), and with cooperation from the California Labor Federation, the ILE conducted a survey of all local unions in the state in 2001–02. The DIR once conducted similar surveys of union membership, publishing regular reports on the subject from the late 1940s until 1987, when this data collection program was abruptly halted. In the first chapter of this volume, Daisy Rooks and I analyze the results of the 2001–02 CUC, along with other data on California union membership, to explore why union density has increased recently in California even as the nationwide decline continues. We provide a detailed portrait of the state's union members, by sector and industry as well as by demographics. The chapter also includes a discussion of union staffing patterns and shows that organizing staff, in particular, are concentrated in a relatively small number of unions.

Complementing this opening chapter is Kate Bronfenbrenner and Robert Hickey's careful analysis of recent union organizing trends in the state, which tracks both National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections and less traditional organizing campaigns, such as those using "card-check" neutrality agreements, over the 1997–2002 period. Not only do California unions win NLRB elections at a slightly higher rate than do unions nationally, but the proportion of workers organized as a result is substantially greater in the state than in the nation (mainly because win rates in large workplaces are higher in California). This chapter points out that the effectiveness of union organizing campaigns varies with the type and combination of tactics used, as Bronfenbrenner's previous work on unions nationwide has shown, and reports that in California, too, win rates are much higher for some unions than for others, especially in the face of determined employer opposition.

Part 2 of this volume turns from developments inside the labor movement to an examination of the wider context of employment in the state. The chapter by Frank D. Bean and B. Lindsay Lowell focuses on employment patterns among California's immigrants, a growing segment of the nation's workforce and an even larger component of the state's. Drawing on recently released 2000 U.S. census data, this chapter offers an overview of immigrant employment statewide as well as in the Los Angeles and San Francisco–San Jose metropolitan areas, comparing the 1990 and 2000 employment distribution of foreign-born workers across industries, by gender, as well as by race and ethnicity. Bean and Lowell interrogate the relationship between the growth of immigrant employment in California and the process of economic

polarization—robust growth in high- and low-paying jobs but relatively little growth in the middle—that has increasingly characterized the state. Building on previous work on polarized job growth in the 2002 *State of California Labor*, they offer an analysis of 1994–2000 Current Population Survey data that suggests that immigration is not the driving force behind the polarization process. Moreover, they provide some evidence that immigrants are moving up in the employment structure over time despite the growing obstacles to such mobility.

Part 2 also includes an important study by Issac Martin, Jerome Karabel, and Sean W. Jaquez that exposes the link between access to higher education and employment outcomes in California. The recent trajectory of social and economic inequality in the state, as well as nationwide, is in large part rooted in the widening divide between college-educated and non-college-educated workers. Thus access—or lack of it—to the prestigious University of California system is a critical factor contributing to the shape of the new inequality. Martin, Karabel, and Jaquez draw on UC admissions data to document the inequalities in access to UC among the state’s high schools. Their analysis shows that students admitted to the university are disproportionately drawn from a small subset of the state’s schools: those whose student bodies are largely affluent, Anglo, and Asian. Access is far more limited for schools serving largely poor, Latino, and/or African American populations.

Part 3 of the volume shifts the focus back to developments directly involving the California labor movement. John Logan’s chapter offers an analysis of AB 1889, the 2000 “Cedillo Bill,” a pathbreaking effort to enforce state neutrality in the labor arena by prohibiting employers that receive state funds from using them to promote or deter unionization. Logan traces the history of this legislation, exposing both the political processes that led to its passage and describing the court challenges that it currently faces. His essay also documents other recent examples of innovative state and municipal labor law in California, including a detailed account of “labor peace ordinances,” which the city of San Francisco pioneered. He situates all these developments in the broader context of ongoing conflict between employers and labor, a conflict whose focal point has shifted from the national to the state and the local level in recent years.

Michael Reich’s chapter on living wage laws in California complements Logan’s analysis, for such legislation has been another major thrust of labor movement efforts in the past decade. Reich’s chapter both chronicles the achievements of the living wage movement in California to date, with detailed accounts of developments in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and insightfully reviews the burgeoning research literature on the economic effects of living wage legislation. Finally, our 2003 edition closes with a review by Daniel J.B. Mitchell of recent labor relations developments in the state. His survey, which covers all major sectors of the California economy, highlights key trends in union-management relations, presenting them in the context of the state’s shifting economic conditions, and charts upcoming collective bargaining agreements.

Any volume of this kind involves extensive collective effort. Special thanks are due to Paul Attewell, Richard Flacks, Stephanie Luce, Roger Waldinger, as well as our Associate Editors and Editorial Advisory Board, for assistance in critically reviewing the articles included here. I am also grateful to ILE staff members Elizabeth del Rocio Camacho and James Robbins for their contributions to the production process, as well as to the exceptional staff at the University of California Press. My most heartfelt thanks go to our managing editor, Rebecca Frazier, for her exemplary work on the volume. She was meticulous in her attention to every detail and tirelessly cheerful in the face of more than the usual delays and difficulties.

Ruth Milkman
For the Editors