

# LABOR CENTER NEWS

Labor Education & Research Center

The Evergreen State College

Winter 2009

## Union Women Build Political Power

2008 Summer Institute & 2009 Evergreen Summer School for Union Women  
by Sarah Laslett



In July of 2008, the British Columbia Federation of Labour hosted the AFL-CIO Western Regional Summer Institute for Union Women (SIUW). The theme of the school was "Women Behaving Politically: Organizing for Change," and I co-taught one of the core courses – Member-to-Member Organizing – with Leslie McNabb from the Canadian Steelworkers. The school was very successful in focusing participants' attention on the need for women to be politically active and run for office, both in the public sphere and within their unions. By becoming elected leaders, women can help build pro-worker political parties and movements on both sides of the border. Leslie and I opened our class by evaluating unions, organizing, and the political and economic status of women in Canada and the U.S. Having activists from both countries provided a valuable opportunity to compare our situations. Canadian women knew that things are tough for U.S. workers and unions, especially with our lacking a national health insurance system, but they were quite shocked to learn how deeply embattled the U.S. labor movement is. While union density is falling in Canada, it is still at about 30%, versus 12% in the U.S.

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## Workers' Rights Manual, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

This past spring, the Labor Center published a second edition of the WA State Workers' Rights manual. The manual can help all workers, whether employed in union or non-union workplaces, know their basic rights and what to do if those rights are being violated.

The manual is available as a pocket-sized, abridged guide in **English or Spanish**. Chapter topics include: *What To Do If You Are Injured on-the-Job; What Leave You Are Entitled To Take; Workplace Discrimination; Organizing a Union; Teen Workers; Work in the Forest: Brush Harvesters; and Your Rights As An Undocumented Worker.*

The manual is also available in an unabridged, 8 ½" x 11" version, in **English or Spanish**. Chapter topics include expanded versions of those listed above, plus additional chapters on *Unemployment Insurance; SSDI and SSI Insurance; and Employment Rights for Military Service Personnel.*

You can order one or multiple copies by emailing [triffen@evergreen.edu](mailto:triffen@evergreen.edu) or calling 360-867-6055. The manual can also be downloaded for free from our website, <http://laborcenter.evergreen.edu> in both English and Spanish.

Many sources were used to compile the manual. If you would like a partial list, please contact the Labor Center.

We are very grateful to over a dozen unions and labor organizations for financial assistance in printing and translating the manual. A complete list appears on the Acknowledgements page of each manual.

# Immigrant Workers in Forks

By Juan José Bocanegra

The great Northwest has some of the most picturesque landscapes in the country, many to be found on the Olympic peninsula. The Ho Rain Forest is one of Washington State's environmental gems. This magnificent forest offers more than just spectacular natural beauty; it also provides many forest products to the global market.

Thousands of people in the northwest earn their living harvesting specialty forest products. These include floral greens like salal, evergreen boughs, moss, ferns, and mushrooms. Hundreds of workers also earn a living cutting blocks from the cedar stumps that have remained long after the majestic old growth trees have been cut down. The blocks are lifted by helicopter from the interior forest to the nearest logging road, then loaded onto trucks and carted to mills to be cut into shakes for house siding and shingles for roofs.

Men from Guatemala and Mexico who make their living from the cedar stumps call themselves, with pride, "Bloqueros." These folks are used to very hard work, have become accustomed to life in the forests, and are intrepid workers who use the chainsaw as we might use a fork and knife. For the most part, they are poorly paid and work long hours crossing wet and slippery terrain with dangerous equipment, made deadly if they get careless. Many have fingers missing or scars on their bodies from accidents at work.

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Salal harvesters, again mostly Guatemaltecos and Mexicanos, call themselves "saladeros." Salal is a spear-shaped leaf coveted world-wide for its ornamental effect. Tons of salal are harvested in the Olympic Peninsula forests and distributed globally. Because of over harvesting, salal workers often have to walk many miles into areas without roads, and then transport the bundles back to sheds where they sell it. While this work is not as dangerous as block cutting, the working conditions are still difficult, with workers climbing over large rocks or fallen trees in their search. Many slip and fall, twist their ankles, break legs, sprain backs and experience many types of soft tissue damage.

Bloqueros, Saladeros, and other forest product workers are considered contractors rather than employees under the law. For the Saladeros, there are a limited number of sheds and shed owners to whom they can sell their products, but the sheds do not employ them. The shed owners set the prices and choose whether or not to buy from any given worker, but take no responsibility for the worker's safety, income, or benefits.

Likewise, the Bloqueros deal with middle-men from the mills who buy their cedar blocks. As independent contractors, workers like these do not have collective bargaining rights and, as a largely immigrant population, have been marginalized and intimidated by both employers and the government. This leaves the Bloqueros and Saladeros to fend for themselves.

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**Forks**, *Continued from previous page*

In the absence of any support or protection on the job, and in light of the high incidence of workplace injuries, PNASH (Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center, Department of Environmental and Occupational Safety and Health Sciences, University of Washington) and the Evergreen Labor Center are offering educational assistance to these workers concerning health and safety, and labor and human rights. We described our work with PNASH in the Winter 07-08 issue of the *Labor Center News*.

In addition to all the problems that these workers face there are still two more obstacles to their livelihood: ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and the Border Patrol. The Border Patrol now makes up the largest police force on the Peninsula and is slated for a staff increase in 2009. They set up random check points on the roads around Forks where they detain local residents. Immigrants are snatched out of their homes and picked up as they are going to work or school, coming out of stores, or working in the woods. More than 45 people have been detained and deported since June from the Forks area alone. More have been detained elsewhere on the Peninsula or have left in fear. Sometimes ICE has detained and deported parents while children are left unattended at home. Businesses are beginning to feel the impact of these raids, as fewer customers shop in the local stores.

In response, more than 100 people have participated in two demonstrations demanding that the police actions stop. The people of Forks are not only tired of having their neighbors disappear, but their children are afraid of being arrested by the officers in the green Border Patrol uniforms or the black jackets that say "ICE" on the back. Community members have asked the Mayor of Forks to help them get the federal government to stop these police actions which endanger their families and their community. The saws, the slippery terrain and the contractor system are nothing compared to the humiliation, intimidation, and disruption caused by these two federal agencies.

## Workshop on Immigration for Non-Immigrant Workers

Immigration – particularly immigration by undocumented workers from south of the border – is on every one's minds these days. It is discussed constantly in the media and in political debates. Positions on the issue cross party lines.

From time to time proposals for reforming immigration law are brought before Congress, but the existing broken system continues unmodified. Because of the impact on jobs, lives, and livelihoods, it is important for all of us to think through existing laws and proposals for reform.

At the Labor Center we've developed a popular education workshop which enables participants to:

- Have an honest discussion about immigration without fear of being politically incorrect (no matter where one stands on the issue);
- Develop their own analysis of the relationship between unions and new immigrants; and
- Analyze and examine issues from many points of view based on solid information.

Workshop participants at both the 2007 Spokane Rank and File Leadership School and Evergreen's Bridges Not Walls conference engaged in a lively debate about jobs, wages, the use of social services, crime rates and whether English should be the official language in the U.S.

Participants at the Spokane school said in their evaluations that although it was not an easy workshop, it was a very good one.

If you are interested in having this workshop for your union or community group, contact Nina Triffleman. Email: [triffle@evergreen.edu](mailto:triffle@evergreen.edu). Phone: 360-867-6055.

***Union Women, continued from p. 1***

Despite greater density, the challenges for unions in Canada are very real. For instance, class participants reported on government plans to privatize and de-unionize their public health care system. The BC provincial government's own study showed that the plan would result in the loss of 28,000 unionized jobs. Nevertheless, the government has undercut union contracts to clear the way for hospital closures. Employees of private contractors earn far less than unionized workers, and this undermines the pay equity that Canadian women health care workers have fought so hard for (87% of health care workers in Canada are women). Canadian unions are strategizing about how to hold both their provincial and national governments accountable for this anti-union privatization.

For the class, Leslie and I asked participants to design a member-to-member campaign around a political and/or union issue that they are facing. The groups worked on who to target and how to: 1) determine appropriate campaign goals, 2) build an action team, 3) create a rap and campaign materials, and 4) determine measures of success. Every group came up with a creative and energetic campaign, and worked hard to hone in on do-able tasks and winnable strategies. At the end, the group did role plays of house visits to practice the conversations they wanted to have.

The Member-to-Member course was one of six core courses offered at the SIUW. The school also included a number of panels on topics like Early Childhood Education and Immigrant Workers. I also co-facilitated a Women's Labor Chorus as part of the school's 'Express Yourself' workshops. About 120 women participated in this SIUW at the beautiful – and unionized – University of Victoria. The 2009 Western Region SIUW will be in Los Angeles, hosted by the UCLA Labor Center. You can find information about that school at <http://www.labor.ucla.edu/>.

The Evergreen Labor Center will also be running our Summer School for Union Women and Community Activists in 2009. Check out the notice below.

## SAVE THE DATE!!

### ***REAL CHANGE FOR WOMEN: LABOR AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL JUSTICE***

#### **THE 2009 SUMMER SCHOOL FOR UNION WOMEN AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS**

***JULY 22-26, 2009, ON THE EVERGREEN CAMPUS IN OLYMPIA, WA***

The Summer School is a dynamic educational program where women learn about some of the most critical issues facing labor and social justice organizing today and develop the skills to respond. Small group work allows participants to share their knowledge, experience, and diverse backgrounds and viewpoints, and to build alliances.

Registration costs, including all classes and materials, housing, and food, will be \$450 - \$550, and scholarships will be available. Program information will be posted on our website as it becomes available: <http://laborcenter.evergreen.edu>. Questions? Contact Sarah Laslett (360-867-6527) [lasletts@evergreen.edu](mailto:lasletts@evergreen.edu), or Nina Triffleman (360) 867-6055 [triffen@evergreen.edu](mailto:triffen@evergreen.edu)

# Training & Education Programs in 2008

## COLLECTIVE BARGAINING TRAINING

In February of 2008, the Labor Center ran an intensive three-day Collective Bargaining Training for the staff of three SEIU locals in Washington. The training covered topics ranging from developing contract campaigns and timelines, to preparing language for contract proposals, to labor law pertaining to bargaining. The participants ranged in experience from never having bargained a contract before to having been at the table many times, and the group learned a lot from each other. Even the most experienced bargainers found the training helpful. Peter Kardas & Sarah Laslett from Evergreen were the lead trainers, and were assisted in the training by staff from a number of SEIU locals, the law firm of Schwerin, Campbell, Barnard, and Iglitzin, and the M. L. King County Central Labor Council's Worker Center. The Labor Center's goal for the future is to run more collective bargaining trainings, hopefully for multiple unions, and including rank-and-file activists as well. If you are interested in such a training, please contact Sarah Laslett at 360-867-6527 ([lasletts@evergreen.edu](mailto:lasletts@evergreen.edu)).

## TEAMSTERS L.E.A.R.N. TRAIN-THE-TRAINER CONFERENCE

Also, in February, Sarah Laslett sat on a panel on 'The State of Labor Education' for a Teamsters Train-the-Trainer conference. The IBT LEARN (Labor Education and Resources Now) network invited IBT officers and staff from all over the country to Teamsters Joint Council 28 in Tukwila for a four-day conference on how to implement the union's internal education program. Part of the introductory day included the panel that Sarah sat on, which examined the overall impact of Labor Education on union development.

## MENTORING TRAINING

In April of 2008, Sarah Laslett and Barbara Byrd from the University of Oregon Labor Education and Research Center ran a mentor training for the organization *Sisters in the Building Trades*. Women in the skilled trades face challenges that are doubled and tripled by gender expectations, sexism, and harassment. *Sisters* works to address their issues and to build a support system for tradeswomen struggling through the work and life challenges of entering a trade. The mentor training was a terrific success. About 40 women participated, sharing their experiences and building communication skills to bring to their mentoring relationships. Sarah did a second mentoring training with the *Sisters* in November of 2008. The plan is to hold these trainings multiple times per year, and eventually expand it to include men. You can find more information about the Sisters at [www.sistersinthebuildingtrades.org](http://www.sistersinthebuildingtrades.org).

## MEETING TRAINING

Also in April 2008, Sarah ran a meeting training with the EmBRACE committee of SEIU 925. This committee provides an official venue for 925 members of color to raise issues of race within their union and to develop leaders of color. The committee asked for the training to improve their meetings' productivity. The training ran for two hours and was judged successful and productive, but too short. Committee members felt that they had gained at least a preliminary understanding of the kinds of communication and procedural skills they need to improve their meetings.

## PRESENTATION AT ELMA HIGH SCHOOL

Also in April, 2008, Sarah responded to a request from a teacher at Elma High School for a presentation on labor to his class. She engaged the class of juniors and seniors in a discussion about their hopes for the future, what jobs they think they will hold after they finish their education (very few assumed they would go on to college), what some of the basic realities of the economy are (e.g. minimum wage vs living wages, and the working poor), and the advantages of union jobs. She also showed the documentary *Eyes on the Fries* about young workers in the service economy, and the struggle to increase the minimum wage in San Francisco. The discussion was fruitful and Sarah learned at least as much from the High School students as they learned from her.

## Workers' Assembly on Immigration

On Friday and Saturday, April 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 The Evergreen State College Labor Center and El Comité Pro Reforma Migratoria y Justicia Social invited workers to Evergreen's Tacoma campus for an exchange of ideas on immigration policy and the experiences of immigrant workers. The event was opened Friday evening by the Director of Evergreen's Tacoma Program Dr. Artee Young. Dr. Young spoke about the need to engage injustice and intolerance and she invited participants to consider attending Evergreen to pursue their educational goals and to understand movements for social justice.

Eric Ward, National Field Director of the Building Democracy Initiative of the Center for New Community, also spoke on Friday night and set the tone for the

conference. He connected the struggle for immigrant rights to the African-American struggle for civil rights. Eric described the tactics of right wing groups which substitute the term "illegals" for earlier racial epithets, while looking for ways to deny participation in our democracy to poor and working people. He urged us to look at the national struggle for immigration policy reform as a continuation of earlier struggles by people of color and working people.

Sandra Aguila from El Comité shared her experiences as a refugee from El Salvador. In the late 70's and 80's El Salvador was facing a vicious military attack on workers and other activists. Many had to flee their country, and faced terror if they were deported back. When she came to the U.S., very few people talked about immigrant rights and the immigrant rights movement itself was immature. Sandra reminded us that solidarity, between men and women, and between all workers struggling for human rights nationally and internationally, is essential if we are to resolve the issue of immigration.

Finally Sergio Salinas, President of Service Employees International Union Local 6 told the Assembly about the victories of immigrant workers organizing in unions in spite of documentation issues. Sergio said that Local 6 has organized over 90% of the janitorial workers in office buildings in the downtown cores of Seattle and Bellevue. Although working in some of the lowest paid jobs in the service economy, Local 6 members earn decent salaries, good benefits, and health care for their families because they have had the courage to organize.

Over 170 people attended the two day assembly, mostly immigrants, mostly from Latin America. On Saturday, the large group broke down into a number of smaller discussion groups to tackle questions which had been generated by an earlier series of meetings within the Latino immigrant community, among African Americans and Native Americans, and from a Women's Committee. These questions drew attention to such issues as the importance of native-born and immigrant workers learning from each other's experiences, and the need to break down barriers based on race or immigration status.

One goal of the Assembly was to tackle divisive stereotypes about immigrants, like the idea that immigrants "steal American jobs!" Another goal was to redirect people's focus from questions of legality (people not having papers) to the economic reality shared by all workers. Real wages have been falling steadily since the 1970s and the gap between the "haves" and the "have not's" has grown enormously. Dialogues at the Assembly focused on workers' common frustrations with employers rather than on complaints workers (with or without papers) have about each other.



*Trio Irecha inspires with Pu'repechan songs*

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**Workers' Assembly, from previous page**

There were many other discussions, about: how workers can treat each other with respect and learn about their respective histories of struggle; how workers can respond to immigration authorities entering a workplace and support each other in defending the civil rights of all workers; how to include women in the process of building solidarity; and how to develop alternative means of communication within communities by taking advantage of radio, television, newspapers and other media. These discussions were all about building the defense of workers from the bottom up. There were very few “legal” solutions discussed or proposed; the discussion was more about developing basic human relations to further the struggle of all workers.

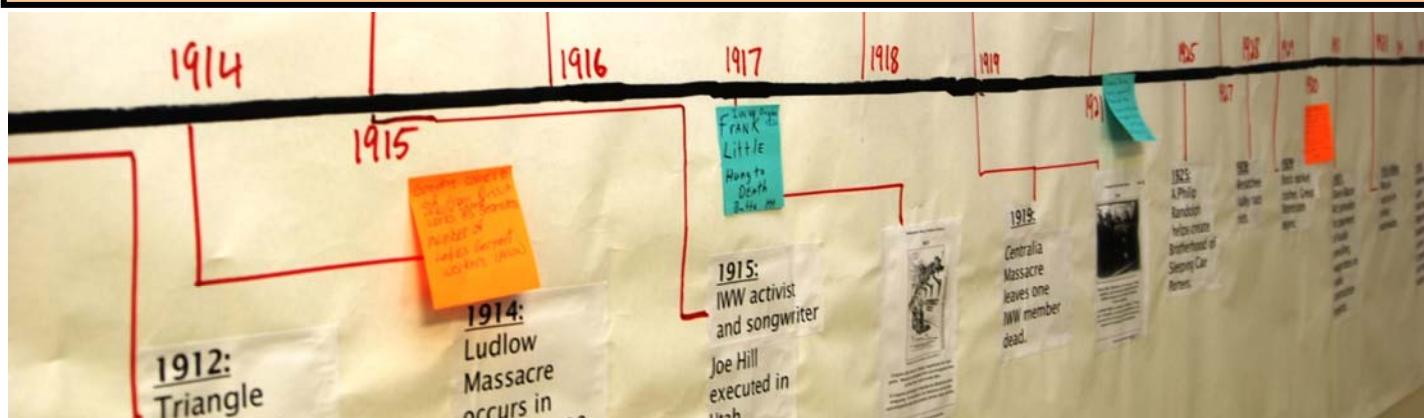
For those who participated – immigrant and non-immigrant alike – the Assembly was a success. However, it also showed the tremendous amount of work that needs to be done to enable dialogue between different communities. Nevertheless, there was an understanding that human dignity and mutual respect are essential to building ties that cannot be torn apart by stereotypes and government intimidation. And while the Assembly may not have been the place to make significant headway on policy questions, the event, including the great food and music, was enjoyed by all.

Co-sponsors of the event included *The American Friends Service Committee, A. Philip Randolph Institute, Laborer's Northwest Regional Organizing Coalition, Service Employees International Union Local 6, Washington State Labor Council, Teamsters 117, UW Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) of Seattle University, NO! SIR, Painters District Council 5, Casa Latina, Orgullo Pu'repecha, MEChA of The Evergreen State College, United Food & Commercial Workers Local 21, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, UNITE-HERE Local 8, Washington Public Employees Association (UFCW Local 365), and Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 8.*

## Labor History PowerPoint—Available Soon

Last year we were fortunate to have a talented Evergreen senior, Brendan Maslauskas Dunn, working at the Labor Center. Brendan developed a pictorial U.S. labor history timeline (with an emphasis on Washington State) in PowerPoint, with an accompanying written text to explain the slides. Brendan presented this timeline at the March 2008 Spokane Rank and File Union Leadership School. The response was very positive. Participants wanted copies to show to their unions and the Central Labor Council requested a repeat showing at a later date.

As this newsletter goes to press, we are editing the presentation (slides and text) and will soon make it publicly available via our website. We will also distribute the final product to high school and community college teachers, apprentice program instructors, union education departments, worker-based community organizations and any other groups or individuals who would find a presentation of our rich labor history useful. For more information, contact Nina Triffleman at [triffle@evergreen.edu](mailto:triffle@evergreen.edu); phone (360) 867-6055.



## Spokane Rank and File Union Leadership School

Within the leadership of U.S. unions there is excitement about the changes coming to Washington DC and about the possibility of the federal government passing legislation that will be helpful to union organizing. How do these changes look to rank and file union members? Is the excitement shared on the shop floor? What difference might the Employee Free Choice Act make in local organizing efforts, and in attempts by union members to increase the activism of existing union members? And what *is* the Employee Free Choice Act, anyway?

These are some of the questions we will explore at our next Rank and File Union Leadership School in Spokane, to be held, in all likelihood, later this Spring or in the Fall of 2009. This will be the fifth multi-union school we have offered in Spokane since 2003. At our last school, in March of 2008, we had 13 participants from 6 unions, including OPEIU, AFSCME, the Steelworkers, CWA, IBEW, and the Cement Masons. That school, like all the previous ones, was sponsored by the Spokane Regional Labor Council and held at the Sheet Metal Workers excellent training center on Trent Avenue.

2008 Spokane Participants



The 2008 school provided lots of opportunity for participants to get to know each other personally, and to learn from each other about how they're dealing with issues in their unions and workplaces. The school was also organized so that people could learn from presenters, films, and exercises. Evergreen student Brendan Maslauskas Dunn, for example, did an introduction to U.S. labor history, using photos and slides in a PowerPoint presentation that was very well received. Nina Triffleman, Labor Center Assistant Director, did a workshop on immigration that encouraged school attendees to examine some of their own assumptions about the role of immigrant workers in the society at large, and in the labor movement in particular. Richard Prete from the Steelworkers did a workshop on workplace labor rights and labor activism (with a focus on safety and health), and Wim Mauldin from the Spokane Alliance discussed that organization's programs and accomplishments, and the importance of alliances between labor unions and community-based organizations.

In addition, as they have in previous years, participants in 2008 went into the streets to do a survey of the public's attitudes about labor unions. The responses are always revealing. Surveyers found that 49% of respondents thought that all Washington residents would be better off if more people belonged to labor unions, while only 18% thought that would not be true. There was also strong support for the right to organize – 82% thought there should be stronger laws to protect workers trying to organize a union. And respondents supported union leadership on health care – 88% said that unions should take a strong lead in trying to get affordable health care coverage for *all* Washington residents.

The 2009 school will be organized with the same diversity of formats and the same opportunities for participation as in 2008, with the added bonus of the excitement coming from the national scene. To find out how to register, contact Beth Thew, Secretary-Treasurer at the Spokane Regional Labor Council, at 509-327-7637 ([bthew@spokanelabor.org](mailto:bthew@spokanelabor.org)).

If you'd like to work with us to arrange for a multi-union school in your region, please get in touch with Peter Kardas or Sarah Laslett at the Labor Center ([kardasp@evergreen.edu](mailto:kardasp@evergreen.edu); [lasletts@evergreen.edu](mailto:lasletts@evergreen.edu)).

## *Shop Steward Training in Longview*

This past September the Labor Center did a one day shop steward training for members of the Longview Employees' Bargaining Association, an independent union of city employees. Like any training we do, the program was highly interactive and built off the experience of the six stewards in attendance. Even though most of them were new to this role, they had – collectively at least – worn the many hats stewards have to wear. Their experience, and their questions, led us into an agenda that included:

- What does a steward do?
- The legal rights of stewards (including stewards having legal equality with management)
- Incorporating legal equality into your steward's psychological attitude
- Review of the EBA contract and city policies as they affect the steward's job
- Communication: with members, with the boss, in grievance or pre-grievance meetings
- Role plays focusing on: the provocatively-dressed member; solidarity with immigrant workers; and why challenging discrimination against LGBT members is a good union thing to do.

It was a good, lively, one day training, and participants seemed to get a lot out of it. The union promised to bring us back to lead more trainings, either for shop stewards, or for members of the collective bargaining team (something we've done for this local on two occasions in the past few years).

If you'd like shop steward or collective bargaining training for your local, get in touch. We'll design the program based on your needs and situation, and for the number of hours you want to make available for it.

## **State Labor Council Supports Expansion of Labor Center**

Washington State Labor Council delegates, officers, and staff showed support for an expansion of the Labor Center through a resolution passed at the 2008 convention in Vancouver, WA. Having two of our current staff members (Juan José Bocanegra and Sarah Laslett) working primarily in the greater Seattle area rather than from Olympia has shown us the possibilities of having an educational center closer to Seattle, specifically between Seattle and SeaTac. Boca and Sarah would have offices there, we'd have workshop and other training space, and the Center would house four new staff whose positions would focus on: 1) strategic research, 2) traditional labor education for union members, 3) an internship opportunity for young trade unionists to learn the skills of labor education, and 4) support work for all staff.

After pointing out the historic underfunding of the Labor Center and the good work the Center has done with limited funds, the resolution ends with the following whereases and resolve:

WHEREAS, the value of strategic research has been demonstrated in other labor centers around the country, for instance at UCLA where it has played a critical role in the development of long-term organizing campaigns; and,

WHEREAS, there is a need among unions around the state for more member educational opportunities on topics such as internal/external organizing, collective bargaining strategies, and labor history; and,

WHEREAS, it is important for the current, small, and aging body of labor educators in the state to nurture a new generation of educators; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Washington State Labor Council will support legislative and gubernatorial efforts that would double Labor Center staff and permit the opening of an educational center in the region between Seattle and SeaTac, and will make lobbying for this funding a priority in the upcoming legislative session.

For the complete text of Resolution 21, go to the following page on the WSLC website:

<http://www.wslc.org/00resolu.htm>.

## Off to the Races! (Or, the Races are Off?)

Everybody likes the ponies (that is the horse races) whether for the thrill of betting, for the circus atmosphere, or for the excitement of seeing these beautiful and powerful beasts in action. Hundreds of thousands of dollars exchange hands electronically or in person; for some, this is an extremely lucrative industry.

However, there is another side to the ponies that is over shadowed by all the fanfare – the work that it takes to get these animals on the track and ready to run. Over 300 men and some women, mostly Latinos, put in hundreds of hours of work in the “backyard” providing the care needed to keep these prized steeds healthy and ready for a few minutes of toil and glory. They work directly for the horse owners who rent space at the track.

The backyard workers face many unique problems on the job. Workers can easily be stepped on by these huge creatures, kicked by an ill-tempered animal, even charged and bitten. However, while the work is hard and the hours are long, the workers find Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to be a greater threat than the horses.

Like millions of other service industry workers, many backyard workers are immigrants and face ongoing scrutiny by ICE which, if nothing else, can severely infringe on workers’ privacy. The agency’s activities at the track have created an environment of sustained panic and have put the job security and livelihoods of backyard workers at risk. The tension with ICE has been going on at this major regional race track since 2007.

Because a regular ICE presence disrupts the daily activities of the workforce, track management had struck a deal with ICE not to come onto the premises without a warrant. When presented with a warrant, management would look for the individuals named and hand them over to ICE. Unbeknownst to management, however, ICE had worked out a separate arrangement with a member of the security staff to hand over 2-3 workers per month. In this way, workers who weren’t named in the ICE warrants were also detained.

Some of the arrested workers incurred large debts to post bail and faced long months of uncertainty waiting for legal decisions from immigration judges. Those who could afford drawn out legal battles, and who had the support of a horse owner, sometimes prevailed and were able to clarify their work status. However, many never had the opportunity to defend their legal rights or to see through to the end their requests to remain legally in the country.

The ongoing process of targeting workers, both through official ICE warrants and through the unofficial activities of security personnel, created a toxic atmosphere for backyard workers. However, instead of being intimidated, the workers decided to organize.

In the summer of 2008, the backyard workers reached out to El Comité Pro Reforma Migratoria y Justicia Social and asked for help in thinking through how to respond to ICE practices at the track. Carlos Marentes, staff organizer for El Comité (and chair of the Labor Center Advisory Committee), and Juan José Bocanegra, Labor Educator for Union and Immigrant Workers at the Labor Center, provided educational support to help the workers understand their rights and strategize a response. The workers strategically chose to threaten a job action on Opening Day, which is typically a lucrative day for the race track and for horse owners. They demanded a renegotiation of the agreement between ICE and the horse owners, or the horses would not run. As a result of the workers’ action, unwarranted detentions stopped and the ponies were off! The issue is not totally resolved but, for the time being, the backyard workers can work in peace, and have shown the power of their unity, even in the toughest of situations.

## An LA Story: Labor Ed & the Labor Movement

By Peter Kardas

Some of the most vibrant labor organizing in the country is happening in a place that for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was known as an anti-union town: Los Angeles. Campaigns for hotel workers, airport workers, port truck drivers, home health care workers, immigrant drywallers, car wash workers: Los Angeles has been alive with organizing, and the stories from that city have inspired activists all over the country.

To get a better sense of what's going on in LA and how different organizations work together, I traveled there in May of 2008 with Jeff Johnson, Special Assistant to the President of the Washington State Labor Council. In addition to the director of the Dolores Huerta Labor Institute (which is housed at the LA Trade Tech College), we interviewed staff and officers from three organizations: the UCLA Labor Center, the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, and the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE). From these organizations we heard most about three campaigns: port truckers; car wash workers; and construction apprenticeships.

The ports campaign was initiated by national Change to Win, which is trying to address the large number of so-called independent truck drivers at major ports. Change to Win brought the campaign idea to the LA County Fed, which got together with the UCLA Labor Center, LAANE, and other partners to discuss what it would take to make this campaign successful in Los Angeles. Those partners emphasized to Change to Win the importance of building alliances with community organizations, environmental organizations, and unions in both the Los Angeles and Long Beach harbor areas.

As it has developed, the union/community campaign resulted in the Los Angeles port commission voting to require that LA port truckers become employees of trucking companies. The port commissioners are appointed by the mayor of Los Angeles, who is supported by the LA Fed. While this new requirement has been challenged in court by trucking companies, the courts have refused to stop it through injunction, and it began to take effect October 1<sup>st</sup>. Once drivers are employees, they can legally organize a union.

The CLEAN car wash campaign involves many of the same actors, though the focus in this case is county-wide rather than at the two major ports. CLEAN stands for Community-Labor-Environmental Action Network and was initiated with educational support from UCLA's downtown Labor Center. The County Fed is also very supportive, and the Steelworkers are involved as organizers.

The construction apprenticeship program again has many of the same players: the LA Fed and the UCLA Labor Center (helping out again with research and leadership training), both working in conjunction with the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency. The intention is to use Project Labor Agreements and Local Hire Programs to move marginalized community members, primarily from the African-American and Latino communities, into unions that have traditionally been the domain of Anglo workers.

At the foundation of all these efforts are at least three factors: the new energy brought to the labor movement in LA initially through the United Farm Workers, then through SEIU and Unite-HERE (and a few other locals); the political and coalition-building focus of the LA County Fed through the work of its late secretary-treasurer Miguel Contreras; and the vision and energy of Kent Wong, who came to UCLA from an SEIU staff position. LAANE, started in the early 1990s, was a creation of the LA County Fed and other partners. It emphasizes union struggles which can result in union contracts, as well as long-term campaigns which often have a public policy focus (port truck drivers, the LAX contracting out campaign, as examples). LAANE does research as well as other aspects of making a campaign successful.

Jeff and I came back thinking about what might be transferable to Washington state. Some of the things I continue to mull over: the close connection between the UCLA Labor Center and other major players, including the LA County Fed and LAANE; the importance of strategic research in all the campaigns; the importance of coalition-building efforts, particularly with community (and increasingly environmental) organizations; and the close connection between the county Fed and organizing unions. It's a mix that seems to work well for LA, and perhaps some version of it can work in Washington State as well.

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