

# PLAYING CATCH-UP: THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN LOS ANGELES AND SAN FRANCISCO, 1985-2005

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*“Los Angeles was built by a business oligarchy ... that fashioned this city as a counterpoint to heavily unionized San Francisco. Here, those tycoons argued, businesses could locate without the threat of strikes or labor violence... Today, the city’s historic Republican, anti-labor politics have given way to the opposite. Los Angeles is dominated by Democratic politicians and their [labor] allies.”*

*Los Angeles Times*  
March 27, 2006, p. A9.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For those familiar with pre-World War II California history, the first part of the above quotation will come as no surprise. Social commentators have often counter-posed Los Angeles with San Francisco, no more so than in the area of working class history. Besides being a “fragmented metropolis” with no tradition of working class protest, Los Angeles has traditionally been seen as an “open shop” town where unions are weak and the civic culture parochial and conservative.<sup>1</sup> San Francisco, on the other hand – with its powerful building trades council and its militant Longshoremen’s Union – is usually described as an open, class-conscious, and politically liberal city (as well as being America’s “union town” par excellence).<sup>2</sup>

Given the assumptions that lie behind this exaggerated version of history, the second part of the quotation may well give the reader pause. Is it really true, at a time when the AFL-CIO nationally is in deep decline, that LA’s immigrant-led unions (many of which barely existed in the 1970s), have not only bucked the national trend but have caught up with – and perhaps even surpassed – the powerful San Francisco labor movement? For supporters of a hoped-for revival in America’s national labor movement, this shift seems too good to be true. Moreover, the impact on public policy and the general political climate in California on a variety of labor-related issues could be dramatic.

Nevertheless the answer to this question, if the available statistics are accurate, is “Yes.” Recent research shows that the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor (LAFED), with some 800,000 members, is almost twice as big as its northern counterpart. Given the larger overall size of the LA workforce, San Francisco’s advantage in absolute numbers is not surprising. It is the change in relative union density levels that is remarkable. By 2001-02, the historic gap in union density between the two cities had narrowed to less than half a percentage point: 16.9% for the Bay Area and 16.5% for Los Angeles.<sup>3</sup>

Numerous differences continue to exist between the labor movements in the two cities. Asians

play a more prominent role in San Francisco's unions than they do in Los Angeles. Conversely, more African Americans are unionized in Los Angeles than in San Francisco, reflecting the overrepresentation of blacks in public employment in Southern California. And despite their massive presence in LA, Latino workers still account for a smaller proportion of union members than whites.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless this dramatic improvement in the fortunes of the Los Angeles labor movement is remarkable.

Why has the LAFED caught up with – and perhaps overtaken – its San Francisco counterpart in recent years? What factors have enabled it to do so? And what, if anything, is the significance of this development for the American labor movement as a whole and for California? What has been the impact on California public policy? This chapter attempts to answer these questions. It begins by summarizing the reasons for Los Angeles' earlier labor weakness. Then it suggests how and why, in the years between 1985 and 2005, the LAFED has not only closed the density gap between its unions and those in the Bay Area but has become, in the words of another recent *Los Angeles Times* article, the “model for labor organizing in the United States today.”<sup>5</sup>

## **2. OTIS TOWN VS. UNION TOWN OVER THE PAST 100 YEARS**

Let me begin with a brief historical account of the reasons for the relative weakness of the Los Angeles labor movement compared to the one in San Francisco in the past:

(i) Between 1880 and 1917, San Francisco's geographical isolation created a scarcity of labor, preventing employers from importing strike breakers and enabling craft workers in the maritime and construction industries to secure the closed shop. By contrast, as a “fragmented metropolis” within striking distance of the Mexican border, Los Angeles developed an ethnically- segmented labor market with a surplus of unskilled laborers.<sup>6</sup>

(ii) LA's business elite, led by *Los Angeles Times* owner Harrison Gray Otis, street-railway entrepreneur Henry Huntington, and the Merchants and Manufacturers Association (M&M), kept wages low and business costs down by developing a hegemonic, open shop policy in the name of “industrial liberty.” They used intimidation, industrial spies, strikebreakers, and an open alliance with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). This activity prevented LA's small, craft unions from developing strong roots.<sup>7</sup>

(iii) San Francisco's early working class included a large percentage of German, Irish, and other European immigrants with strong union backgrounds. Its internal cohesion was strengthened by the anti-Chinese movement, which San Francisco's white workers saw as their “indispensable enemy.” The anti-Chinese movement in LA was just as virulent as the one in San Francisco, but because the number of Chinese in Southern California was much smaller, anti-Chinese sentiment did not play as significant a role in uniting the white working class as it did in the Bay Area.<sup>8</sup>

(iv) The majority of LA's workers through the 1950s were socially conservative, pietistic Protestants from the rural Midwest who moved west, not to exchange the isolation of farm life for factory labor, but to benefit from LA's middle class lifestyle and suburban way of life. They were either indifferent to, or openly racist towards, the growing number of Mexican immigrants and African

Americans in Los Angeles, thereby limiting their craft unions to a small circle of printers, carpenters, machinists, and other white artisans.<sup>9</sup>

(v) The critical period, as far as establishing San Francisco's lead in labor organizing was concerned, was between 1894 (when General Otis launched his open-shop campaign) and 1912. LA's weak unions lost most of their strikes while those in San Francisco, especially the Teamsters and the affiliates of the powerful Building Trades Council, went from strength to strength.<sup>10</sup> The McNamara brothers' confession to the bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* helped to defeat Job Harriman, the Socialist Party candidate for mayor in 1911, and brought labor organizing to a virtual halt for several years.<sup>11</sup> In San Francisco, by contrast, the Union Labor Party held municipal office for almost ten years before the First World War.<sup>12</sup>

(vi) World War I brought labor gains to both cities, but in contrast to San Francisco the loss of strikes by longshoremen, telephone operators, and Pacific Electric motormen in LA enabled employers to maintain the open shop intact. The 1919 Red Scare and the California Criminal Syndicalism Act weakened the movement in both cities, but in LA it was compounded by nativist sentiment directed towards Mexican immigrants in 1917-18 and by the anti-union activities of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>13</sup>

(vii) In the 1930s, the traditional, craft-oriented American Federation of Labor (AFL) was faced with an internal revolt by those who wanted to organize unskilled and semi-skilled workers on industrial lines. Eventually, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) split off from the AFL. During the CIO period, Los Angeles labor caught up with its San Francisco counterpart to some extent. The main reasons for this were the revelations by the U.S. Senate's La Follette Committee of the M&M.'s illegal activities, the election of liberal Mayor Bowron to LA's city hall, and the pro-labor policies of the New Deal, especially Section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act (1933). Section 7a guaranteed labor's right to organize and bargain collectively and broke the open shop's grip in southern California.<sup>14</sup>

(viii) In 1936, organizing efforts on behalf of the CIO were begun in both northern and southern California. In LA, the Industrial Council of the CIO succeeded in organizing numerous establishments in the steel industry, automobile assembly plants, and aircraft factories before and during the Second World War. But although the AFL remained dominant in both cities, the labor movement in San Francisco remained stronger than it did in LA due to the success of the CIO's organizing campaigns in Oakland and to the power and prestige of the International Longshoremen's and Warehouseman's Union (ILWU) under the leadership of CIO West Coast director Harry Bridges.<sup>15</sup>

(ix) In 1947, after a Communist-led strike at Warner Brothers, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigated the Hollywood movie industry. This investigation marked the beginning of the post World War II anti-communism which resulted in blacklists, worker dismissals, and the 1949 decision by the CIO to purge communists from its ranks. The unions in San Francisco were also weakened by the CIO split and a government attempt to deport Australian-born Harry Bridges. But given the greater, national salience of the Hollywood film industry and the social conservatism of the Los Angeles population, the effects of McCarthyism were more damaging to the labor movement in Los Angeles than they were in the Bay Area.<sup>16</sup>

(x) By this time, industrial development on both sides of San Francisco Bay had long since

ended the geographical isolation which gave San Francisco's union organizers their initial advantage. The fact that Los Angeles had overtaken San Francisco as a manufacturing center also helped level the playing field. As a result, LA emerged from the World War II era with a stronger labor movement, even if its unions still lagged behind those in San Francisco. In 1955, the peak year for the AFL-CIO nationally, union density stood at 51% in the Bay Area and in Southern California at 37%.<sup>17</sup>

### **3. DE-INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE IMPACT OF MASS IMMIGRATION**

In the years between 1965 and 1985, the labor movement in both Los Angeles and San Francisco suffered significant setbacks for the same reasons that the AFL-CIO lost members all over the country. This decline was aggravated by the impact of de-industrialization. In Los Angeles county alone an estimated 15,000 to 30,000 unionized jobs were lost between 1980 and 1984, including those at Firestone Rubber (South Gate), at Bethlehem Steel (Vernon), and at most of the area's auto assembly plants. The largest steel mill in the area, at Fontana, also shut down.<sup>18</sup> Similar developments took place in San Francisco, although on a somewhat smaller scale. Virtually all of the Bay Area's steelworks, lumber mills, tire plants and vehicle assembly plants shut down, most notably the giant General Motors plant at Fremont.<sup>19</sup>

The net result was that many of the strongest unions in both northern and southern California, including UAW Local 645 in Burbank and Steelworkers Local 1440 in San Francisco, lost between one third and one half of their members. Overall union density in the Bay Area declined from 34.2% of the workforce in 1975 to 20.4% in 1985. In southern California it fell from 32% to 18%. In addition white flight from downtown Oakland and from south central Los Angeles accelerated sharply, bringing unemployment, poverty, and urban decay in its wake.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the Immigration Act of 1965 and economic problems in Mexico brought a flood of third world immigrants into the California labor market. Between 1970 and 1990 about 750,000 Chinese, Mexican, Filipino, and Vietnamese immigrants arrived in the Bay Area, most of whom settled into previously-established immigrant enclaves in San Jose, East Oakland, on the flat lands of the East Bay, and in Silicon Valley.<sup>21</sup> In southern California the number of third world immigrants was much larger, but harder to enumerate because of the high proportion of undocumented workers among them.

The best evidence suggests that between 1980 and 2000, more than four million immigrants, most of whom came from rural parts of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the Philippines, as well as from a variety of south east Asian countries, settled in the five-county Southern California region. Most of these newcomers were in their early twenties and thirties. One half of them were married, but few spoke English and less than one-fifth had been to high school.<sup>22</sup>

Despite its damaging effects, de-industrialization did not have as far-reaching consequences in California as it did in Detroit or in the rust belt cities around Pittsburgh. In southern California at least, the aircraft and aerospace industries acted as bridge between the closing of the giant, mass production factories and the opening of hundreds of new, relatively small, modern factories producing high-tech equipment which signaled the arrival of the new economy.<sup>23</sup> Renewed job expansion occurred on several different levels: among well-paid engineers, scientists, and technical specialists; among state

employees and white collar workers; and among low-paid assembly workers employed in the electronics, computer, and defense industries. At the same time, an even larger number of employees were recruited to work in service occupations and light manufacturing from the hundreds of thousands of poor immigrants who entered California from Mexico and Asia.<sup>24</sup>

In 1963, for example, about 38,000 people worked for the city of San Francisco. By 1982, that number had increased to 112,000, while the number of low income service jobs had jumped from 63,400 to 214,918.<sup>25</sup> A much-reduced number of semi-skilled, blue-collar workers were now needed, many of them being machinists, engineers, and technicians who kept the productive machinery of the new, high-tech economy humming. The decline of the blue-collar sector led several commentators to label the new dispensation an “hourglass economy with a missing middle.”<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. ORGANIZING SUCCESSES IN THE 1990s

The first large-scale breakthrough in the revival of California labor occurred in Los Angeles in June 1990, when SEIU Local 399 forced ISS, an international building maintenance company, to offer a union contract to 6,000, mostly Latina and Latino janitors in Century City. This campaign was the largest private sector, immigrant organizing success since the United Farm Workers’ (UFW) campaign of the 1970s. The organizers employed a number of innovative tactics, including exerting nation-wide pressure on the cleaning company through Gus Bevona, a powerful SEIU local official in New York.

A turning point came when an assault by the LAPD on demonstrators attempting to organize janitors in Century City was caught on camera. The incident angered Mayor Bradley and drew public attention to the plight of low-wage immigrants. Their sense of class solidarity was also enhanced by their isolation at night in buildings which they had to themselves – somewhat like coal miners who worked side by side underground.<sup>27</sup>

Not long after the janitors’ victory, there was a five-month long strike by LA’s Mexican drywall workers which temporarily halted residential construction in downtown Los Angeles by closing down hundreds of building sites. About 2,400 male *drywalleros* doubled their wages and joined the union of their trade when the Carpenters, a white-dominated union with an early history of racism, negotiated a settlement on their behalf.<sup>28</sup> Then came a successful wildcat strike by 1,200 employees at the American Racing Equipment wheel factory, who subsequently joined the International Association of Machinists.<sup>29</sup> Similar to the case of the drywall workers, this effort was spontaneously undertaken by the rank-and-file workers, rather than by union officials (as was the case with the Justice for Janitors campaign).<sup>30</sup>

Immigrant workers in the Bay Area also made important gains. In September 1989, Hotel and Restaurant Union Local 2 forced the city’s new Marriott Hotel to adopt hiring practices favorable to ethnic minorities. In 1991, Local 250 of the Hospital and Health Care Workers Union carried out a successful organizing campaign in several San Francisco’s hospitals.<sup>31</sup> And at the San Francisco airport, where a Living Wage ordinance came into effect in July 2000, SEIU and other unions recruited hundreds of new members. The airport commission required companies with franchises on its property to adopt card check agreements, mandating union recognition when more than half the workers in a business signed union cards.<sup>32</sup> Other major union efforts included increasing the power of

the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) among state and municipal workers, the organizing of students on college campuses, and HERE's well-publicized demonstrations on behalf of hotel employees.<sup>33</sup>

But the largest single "new unionist" victory was won in 1999, when SEIU locals succeeded in organizing 89,000 poor, mostly female, home care workers of many different nationalities in cities up and down the state. The union spent almost twelve years securing legislation to permit county authorities to act as bargaining agents for the workers, building grassroots coalitions to locate and mobilize this fragmented labor force, and establishing alliances between the home care workers and the recipients of their services. Results included wage increases, medical benefits, and the addition of 74,000 new workers to the union ranks in Los Angeles and 20,000 in San Francisco. More than any other success, this victory confirmed the value of SEIU's tactic of devising strategies tailor-made to fit the needs of each of its constituencies.<sup>34</sup>

Overall, more than 375,000 new recruits were added to the union ranks in Los Angeles and San Francisco between 1990 and 2000. As the above narrative has shown, not all of these successes occurred in the public sector. Aside from hotel and construction workers, both of whom work for private employers, the inclusion of some private sector workers in public sector unions such as SEIU resulted from a growing tendency on the part of state and local governments to save money by contracting jobs out to private, often non-union, employers.<sup>35</sup>

Only a small proportion of the workers from California's newly-expanded labor force joined unions in the period between 1985 and 2005, whether they lived in the Bay Area or in Southern California. According to data collected by Ruth Milkman and Daisy Rooks, only 11.7% of California's immigrant workers had joined the unions of their trades by 2001, compared to 19.7% of their native-born counterparts.<sup>36</sup> This differential in part reflected the fact that immigrants constituted a much larger proportion of the state's labor force than they did in the United States as a whole.

In addition, when immigrants were recruited into unions, they joined a relatively small number of them. In both Los Angeles and San Francisco, by far the largest and most powerful, immigrant-oriented unions were the various locals of SEIU. By 2001, no less than 21.4% of all union members in the Bay Area were SEIU members, the comparable figure for Los Angeles being 15.4%. Trailing a long way behind, in terms of new recruitment, were the teachers' unions, the United Food and Commercial Workers, HERE, and – in Los Angeles – the entertainment workers' organizations.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, it was primarily the victories that were secured in the public sector that transformed California's labor movement between 1985 and 2005. Instead of trailing along behind the unions in the mid western industrial states, West Coast labor became one of the few bright spots of union growth amid a national picture of ongoing labor decline. In 2001, California's unions were still growing, unlike those in most other states. In that year the union density gap between Los Angeles and San Francisco fell to an insignificant half a percentage point. Among workers in the Bay Area union density now stood at 16.9%; in Southern California it was 16.5%.<sup>38</sup> What accounts for this remarkable reversal of outcomes?

## **5. DIFFICULTIES OF ORGANIZING IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

Before turning to an analysis of the reasons for these organizing successes, it should be emphasized that by far the greatest expansion of unionism that occurred in this period took place in the public, not the private, sector of California's economy. Among private employers, union density declined just as sharply as it did elsewhere. But by 2001, as many as 53.8% of California's state and county employees had been enrolled into the labor movement, compared to only 37.6% of public employees nation-wide. By this time union density in the private sector had fallen to 10%, a slightly higher figure than the nation-wide average of 8.8%.<sup>39</sup>

The difficulties of private-sector organizing can be illustrated by pointing to labor's failure to unionize two of California's largest, private-sector industries, namely garment and electronics, which developed in the downtown areas of Los Angeles and San Francisco and in Silicon Valley and Orange County. In the case of garments, which in 1994 employed 119,400 workers in Los Angeles, this failure was not for want of trying.<sup>40</sup> Unions such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (now amalgamated into UNITE-HERE after various mergers) carried out numerous organizing campaigns in both Los Angeles and San Francisco, but met with little success.

Earlier, this private-sector failure could be attributed in part to racial and gender bias.<sup>41</sup> Now, however, it is generally recognized that the two main reasons for failure were the fragmentation of the garment industry into hundreds of small, exploitative sweatshops; and the outsourcing of garment production to low-wage, third world countries such as Mexico or the Philippines. In San Francisco, where the garment industry accounted for about twenty per cent of the city's manufacturing output, the state Labor Commission condemned sixty sweatshops in 1991 for violating its health and safety provisions.<sup>42</sup>

In 1996, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) spent a good deal of money trying to organize Guess Inc., a large and profitable southern California garment manufacturer with a labor force of about 3,500. Most of Guess' output had traditionally been produced in large factories in downtown LA. But even this well funded campaign did not succeed. Early in 1997, Guess Inc. retaliated against the union by announcing that it planned to outsource most of its production to cheaper factories in Mexico.<sup>43</sup>

The prospects for unionization appeared even worse in the privately-owned electronics industry. In one sense the work environment in electronics (which includes TV assembly, circuit board stamping, and the production of surgical devices) differed significantly from that in garment. Instead of toiling in unsanitary, lofts and store fronts crowded together in a single, downtown neighborhood, most electronics employees work in modern, well-appointed glass and steel buildings. In other respects, however, the work culture in electronics and garment was quite similar. Both industries demanded long hours for low wages; both made extensive use of home work; both exercised harsh discipline over their poorly educated, largely female labor force; and in both industries the turnover rate was very high. All of these practices made labor organizing exceedingly difficult.<sup>44</sup>

At first, most of the new high-tech plants in Silicon Valley and Orange County were also interspersed among shopping malls, family businesses, and residential neighborhoods where unions were unpopular, where there was no autonomous tradition of worker protest, and where conspicuous

consumption was the order of the day<sup>45</sup>. Moreover, most high-tech employers in the industry followed a policy of vertical disintegration. This policy meant that when they got the chance, they transferred work from large factories employing several hundreds of workers to smaller, more specialized plants, rendering them even more difficult to organize.

As in garment, high-tech employers also used outsourcing as a way to avoid unionization. If his labor costs were too high, or if a labor organizer began an organizing campaign, the typical electronics employer would threaten to sell its electronics components to a foreign company for completion, or move the company to Taiwan, Mexico or the Philippines. In 1974, for example, two organizers from Local 1412 of the United Electrical Workers in Oakland persuaded one hundred workers at the Siliconex Co. in San Jose to sign union cards. Before a union election could be held, however, Siliconex management threatened to move their plant abroad, which effectively ended the organizing drive.<sup>46</sup>

Karen Hossfield has suggested that it was the insensitivity of male organizers from the Machinists and Electrical Workers unions towards the special needs of female, high tech workers that also contributed to union failure. “If this was steel, or auto,” she quotes one interviewee as saying, “they’d give us a lot more attention.”<sup>47</sup> Hossfield may be right. Even so, it is clear from this brief analysis that both the garment and the electronics industries were part of the private sector where anti-union pressures were extremely strong, and that they – like other privately-owned, manufacturing industries – were subject to capital flight (i.e., to the export of jobs) in ways that occupations in the public sector were not.

Do these failures in garment and electronics mean that no future advances can be expected from unions in the private sector? The answer to this question is probably “No.” To so argue would be to ignore the victories scored by HERE, SEIU, and the Carpenters Union in the 1990s among LA’s drywallers, hotel employees, and other private-sector workers. Nevertheless, it is clear from statistics published in 2001 that the “new unions” in both northern and southern California enjoyed much greater success in organizing workers in the public sector of the economy, whether they were white collar, pink collar, or blue collar, than they did in the private sector. Whereas 53.8% of the state’s public-sector employees had joined unions by that year (compared to 37.8% nationally) only 10% of the state’s private-sector labor (compared to 8.8% nation-wide) remained unionized.<sup>48</sup>

The causes of this greater success in the public sector are not far to seek. The main reason is that the public officials who determine the wage levels and working conditions of state and county employees are answerable to the electorate in ways which private employers are not. Also, on the face of it state officials, unlike private employers, have no inherent reason to be hostile towards unions.<sup>49</sup> Since the total number of public-service workers, as well as the percentage of them organized into unions, is greater in LA than it is in the Bay Area,<sup>50</sup> it stands to reason that their political influence, and the ability of unions such as SEIU to mobilize them at election time, is greater in Southern California than it is in San Francisco. This difference is the basic reason for the superior degree of political influence possessed by the labor movement in Los Angeles. As we shall see, it is this factor, more than any other, which has enabled the LA unions to catch up with their counterparts in San Francisco.

By political influence I do not simply mean electoral politics. The day-to-day interests of union

members who provide services to the public in libraries, schools, state welfare offices, and health centers are more closely tied to the needs of the local community than are the narrow economic interests of private-sector trade unionists. Hence, it is easier for public-sector unionists to develop and maintain broad-based, political coalitions with local groups of environmental reformers, sympathetic clergy, and Living Wage advocates than it is for private-sector unions.<sup>51</sup> The same goes for issues such as immigration and affirmative action.

## 6. SOME GENERAL REASONS FOR ORGANIZING SUCCESS

Perhaps most important general reason for the organizing successes just noted was the commitment of new resources to organizing and the rise to power of a new generation of labor leaders who understood the needs of immigrant workers and were willing to shape their tactics accordingly. This recognition was given an enormous boost by the decision of the AFL-CIO in 2000 to reverse its long-standing policy of opposing undocumented workers as threats to the jobs of U.S. citizens, and its decision to try and enroll them into unions instead.<sup>52</sup> Capitalizing on the influx of a new generation of Latino organizers and on the sympathies of New Left activists who entered the unions from the civil rights movement in the 1970s and 1980s, the AFL-CIO trained a new generation of labor leaders at its Organizing Institute (1989) some of whom quickly reached positions of authority.<sup>53</sup>

One corollary of this development was the realization on the part of undocumented immigrants themselves that they had a right to join unions, and that the police in most cities would not arrest them or report them to the immigration authorities just because they joined picket lines or participated in other forms of union activity. Accompanying this shift was the breakdown of paternalistic ties between management and recently-arrived immigrants who initially depended on their employers for protection and who tended to believe that they would be deported if they made a public commitment to joining a union. In legal terms, the position of undocumented workers was reinforced by the 1988 decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals in California (in *Patel v. Quality Inn South*, 846 F.2d 700, 704 [11th Cir. 1988]) that their right to organize was protected under federal labor law.<sup>54</sup> In practical terms, it was strengthened still further by the negotiation of a contract between the ILGWU and undocumented employees at the Camagua mattress company in Los Angeles.<sup>55</sup>

The second general reason for the revival of the California labor movement was the growing influence of the women's movement. It is common knowledge that rising divorce rates, the decline in real income among families with a single, male wage earner, and the dramatic growth in public sector employment have revolutionized the labor-market role of women over the past twenty years.<sup>56</sup> This development has influenced immigrant women as well as native-born whites. The main reason why poor, Latina service workers have joined unions in increasing numbers in recent years is probably the anger they feel at employer exploitation and atrocious working conditions, coupled with their growing dissatisfaction with the strict, patriarchal culture which their parents brought with them from Mexico.

A recent study of higher-status female employees such as nurses also showed that it was gender ideology – not concern over the downgrading of their profession – that prompted a rise in hospital workers' militancy.<sup>57</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, AFCSME, the American Federation of Teachers, and numerous other unions all established special women's departments, while SEIU sponsored its own District 925 to cater to women's special needs.<sup>58</sup> These developments affected

women all across the U.S., of course, but they appear to have had a particular impact on union organizing in California. By 2001, female employees made up 46.4% of all union members in the state, compared to 41.8% nation-wide.<sup>59</sup>

A third overall factor aiding the union revival in California in the 1980s and 1990s was the willingness of a new generation of labor organizers to make use of a wide range of new organizing techniques. These techniques would have appeared highly unorthodox, if not actually remiss, to the leaders of the AFL-CIO in earlier decades. Many of these new techniques originated in the civil disobedience tactics of the civil rights movement and the New Left. For example, the Justice for Janitors recruiting demonstration held by SEIU Local 399 in Century City in June 1990, deliberately ignored the electoral procedures overseen by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) because of the way in which employers had learned to manipulate union elections. The American Racing Equipment stoppage was a wildcat strike – a tactic frowned upon by most orthodox unions.<sup>60</sup>

The drywall strikers also operated outside of the usual Carpenters Union procedures, while the July, 2000, organizing campaign on behalf of service workers at the San Francisco airport was built around a Living Wage ordinance which had been enacted as a result of community pressure.<sup>61</sup> Finally, the HERE Local 2 restaurant workers strike in the Bay Area used direct action tactics that would have been more familiar to the radical International Workers of the World (IWW) in an earlier era than they were to the orthodox leaders of the AFL-CIO. During their 1980 stoppage, the Asian employees in several San Francisco restaurants held a “dinner-a-thon” during which they ate soup at tables that would normally have been occupied by paying customers.<sup>62</sup>

## **7. POLITICAL ACTION AS THE MAIN REASON WHY LABOR IN LOS ANGELES HAS CAUGHT UP WITH LABOR IN SAN FRANCISCO**

Each of these general explanations for organizing success apply equally to the revival of unionism in both northern and southern California. What special factors enabled the Los Angeles movement to catch up with its San Francisco counterpart? I believe that there were three such factors: (i) The larger organizing role of Central American refugees in Los Angeles, (ii) Differences in the approach to political coalition building between Los Angeles and San Francisco; and (iii) the greater political effectiveness of LA’s Latino-labor alliance.

### **(i) The Larger Organizing Role of Central American Refugees in Los Angeles**

Before 1980, most Central Americans arriving in California were economic refugees who settled in the Bay Area. But in the early 1980s, the military dictatorships in Guatemala and El Salvador stepped up their campaign of violence against students, priests, and union leaders who supported the guerilla movements that were challenging their regimes. With family networks already established in Westlake, MacArthur Park, and South Los Angeles, the number of Central American refugees who came to Southern California increased sharply and overtook the number of those who settled in the Mission District in San Francisco.

According to the 1990 census, the combined Salvadoran and Guatemalan populations in the five-county Southern California region reached 460,835. This level was much larger than the number

of Central American refugees in the Bay Area.<sup>63</sup> In addition, of course, the number of Mexican immigrants who were likely to sympathize with the political goals of the Central American refugees was far higher in Los Angeles than it was in the Bay Area.

Several hundred of these Central American refugees became active in the political clubs that were founded in Los Angeles to give support to the revolutionary movements in their native lands. At its height in 1983, for example, the *Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional* (FMLN) – a left-wing El Salvadoran guerilla group which later became a political party – had at least 1,000 members in Southern California, with nine affiliated groups in the Pico Union area named according to individual blocks or streets such as Alvarado, Bixel, or Westlake 1 and 11. More important for our purposes is the fact that the members of these clubs played a prominent role the Justice for Janitors campaign, in UNITE’s efforts to organize the garment industry, and in the activities of HERE Local 11.

In addition, several Central Americans who had been activists in their home countries became well-known labor organizers. They included Mauricio Vasquez, who had been a member of Andes-21 teachers union in El Salvador.<sup>64</sup> In 1994 Eliseo Medina, SEIU International Vice President for the Western United States, paid tribute to the leading role which Central Americans were playing in LA’s “new unionist” movement. “Immigrants from Central American have a much more militant history as unionists than we do,” he said, “and the more militant they are, the more the union can do.”<sup>65</sup>

Other Central American union organizers in the Los Angeles area were able to draw on their experience in the United Farm Workers (UFW) and in *El Centro de Accion Social-Hermandad General de Trabajadores*, otherwise know as CASA. A comparison of the news items linking central American refugees to union activities in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* in the period between 1984 and 1988 yielded significantly fewer examples of union activism on the part of Salvadoran and Guatemalan union activists in the Bay Area.<sup>66</sup>

## **(ii) Differences in Political Coalition Building Between Los Angeles and San Francisco**

During the 1970s it appeared as if San Francisco’s long history as a labor town would enable its unions to maintain a greater degree of influence in local politics than its LA counterparts would be able to do. Between 1968 and 1974, the San Francisco Building Trades Council made use of its traditional political influence by helping to elect Joseph Alioto as mayor in two successive elections. In return, Alioto placed several labor leaders (including the aging Harry Bridges) on city commissions, ordered the police chief to treat picketers gently during strikes, and lent his support to several major public building projects.<sup>67</sup> Similar developments occurred during the administration of Mayor Diane Feinstein during the 1980s.<sup>68</sup>

By 1990, however, when the Justice for Janitors march in Century City signaled the beginning of labor’s resurgence in southern California, the character of local politics in the Bay Area had changed. High rents drove an increasing number of working-class families out of the city in search of cheaper housing in the suburbs. At the same time, the gentrification of the city of San Francisco proceeded apace, turning it into the most highly-developed tourist, arts-oriented, center of yuppified lifestyles in the United States. The emergence of this new form of urban populism was marked by the

passage in November 1986, of Proposition M, which imposed a permanent limit on annual downtown office construction, and established goals regarding traffic control, affordable housing, and a training program for the city's unemployed.<sup>69</sup>

In 1992, political scientist Richard DeLeon attempted to define this new form of urban politics when he distinguished between three separate "lefts" in San Francisco. The first of these "lefts" was the so-called economic liberal left, which upheld the traditional interests of workers in such bodies as the Building Trades Council by supporting pro-growth policies at city hall. A second, so-called environmentalist left, reflected the desire of upwardly-mobile yuppies and professionals to protect their neighborhoods by opposing new urban development. A third element, which DeLeon labeled populist, consisted of community reformers such as San Francisco's gay community which advocated grass-roots democracy and empowerment from below. The newly dominant progressive ideology in San Francisco, as DeLeon saw it, could be summarized as "a system of values, beliefs and ideas that encourages... limits on growth, neighborhood preservation, and ethnic-cultural diversity under conditions of public accountability."<sup>70</sup>

It is of course true that similar political and cultural divisions have arisen between environmentalists, populists, and economic liberals in Los Angeles, as well as in other large cities through out the United States.<sup>71</sup> West Hollywood, for example, became a center for the assertion of homosexual life styles and the exercise of gay political power in much the same way that the Castro District did in San Francisco. It is part of a more general tendency in U.S. politics in which the language of environmentalism and of personal identity has supplanted the language of class, or of political economy, as a means of expressing the underlying tensions in society.<sup>72</sup> But San Francisco's emergence as the capital of yuppie and homosexual culture, coupled with the fact that it lagged behind LA as a manufacturing city, meant that the populist and environmentalist wings carried more weight than economic liberal wing did in the progressive coalition which held the balance of power in city politics.

The best-known incident marking the emergence of gay political power on the San Francisco scene was the election of Harvey Milk as a supervisor, followed closely by his tragic assassination in 1978.<sup>73</sup> But this event was followed by the consolidation of gay political power in San Francisco in the 1980s and 1990s in ways that did not occur on the same scale in Los Angeles. In southern California, with its huge population of immigrant Latino wage earners, traditional liberal, economic demands for improved welfare services, low-income housing, and more and better schools remained paramount.<sup>74</sup>

This difference in political styles became apparent during the municipal elections held in Los Angeles and San Francisco between 1999 and 2005. In 1999, San Francisco's progressives ran Tom Ammiano, the openly gay president of the Board of Supervisors whose core support came from the Mission and Haight-Ashbury districts, for mayor against incumbent Willie Brown. Predictably, Brown trounced Ammiano by 59% of the vote to 40%.<sup>75</sup> The new political alignment was also demonstrated in 2003, when Green Party candidate Matt Gonzales, described by one source as a "lefty [Supervisor] who held art shows in his city hall office," lost to Gavin Newsom, a young businessman designated by Willie Brown as his successor.<sup>76</sup>

In Los Angeles, by contrast, the progressive candidate in both the 2001 and 2005 mayoral elections was Antonio Villaraigosa, a one-time organizer for the LA teachers' union whose victory in 2005 was built around a fast maturing, labor-Latino political alliance. The most important issues in Villaraigosa's political campaigns were traditional liberal ones. He pushed for the need for more affordable rental housing, improved public transportation, and a reformed school system controlled by city hall.<sup>77</sup>

### **(iii) The Greater Effectiveness of LA's Latino-Labor Alliance**

In the May 2005 mayoral election, the Latino vote reached 25% of the total for the first time in modern Los Angeles history - up from 22% in 2001 and from a mere 10% in the 1993 mayoral race.<sup>78</sup> Only a relatively small minority of the Mexicans eligible to vote have so far done so, but the 2005 election showed just how great their potential voting strength was. It was far greater than that of any single ethnic group, or combination of ethnic groups, in the San Francisco electorate. By carrying the 2005 election by 58% to 41% over his predecessor James Hahn, Mayor Villaraigosa won by a greater margin than in any mayoral election since 1973.<sup>79</sup> What were the reasons for this growing Latino interest in electoral politics?

Some of LA's Latinos took advantage of a new opportunity to vote which resulted from the amnesty provision contained in the Immigration Reform and Control Act that was passed in 1986. But it was not until 1994, when Republican Governor Pete Wilson threw his support behind Proposition 187, that Mexican-Americans and other Latinos in Southern California began to vote in large numbers. (Prop 187 - largely invalidated by litigation after it passed - would have denied public services to illegal immigrants.) The results have been remarkable. In twelve short years, dozens of Latino elected officials have been elected all over Los Angeles County, including four congressmen, two county supervisors, and eight mayors in independent municipalities.<sup>80</sup> These elected officials had a mutually reinforcing effect on each other in the passage of favorable labor legislation in Sacramento and in county and city ordinances.

In just over a decade the number Mexican-Americans on the LA city council who are sympathetic to labor also rose from one to four.<sup>81</sup> With a couple of other progressive allies, that number was almost enough to create the basis for a controlling interest in Los Angeles city government. Equally significant, however, was the remark made by a *Los Angeles Times* reporter on March 17, 2007. Having interviewed a number of prominent business leaders, he concluded that labor's new-found political clout was most strongly felt, "not in its presence at the City Council so much as in the reticence of its critics. Business representatives today grumble about labor among themselves.... Publicly, [however], they restrict themselves to guarded acknowledgments that the ground has shifted."<sup>82</sup>

The turning point, as far as the political influence of LA's Latino-labor alliance was concerned, came in 1996 with the election of Miguel Contreras as head of the LAFED. Contreras commissioned polling of both union members and immigrant workers in order to determine their common interests. It showed joint support for school bond issues, "new union" organizing campaigns, and raising the state minimum wage. In 1998, Los Angeles Latinos voted 75% to 25% to defeat Proposition 226, which would have limited unions' political activities, a liberal voting pattern they have maintained virtually

ever since.<sup>83</sup>

It is worth noting that these voting patterns contradicted many of the assumptions earlier held about Latinos, which is that most of them came from culturally conservative backgrounds and would not support progressive Democrats. It is true that Mexican-Americans and other Latinos are not as liberal as blacks on such matters as public welfare and nonconformist lifestyles. In 1996, for example, a majority of Latinos voted to reject the state-wide initiative on the use of medical marijuana. But in that same ballot Latino voters in LA County supported raising the state minimum wage by 86% to 14%, a bigger margin than that of any other group in the state.<sup>84</sup>

During the following eight years, worker-based political victories came thick and fast. In 1997 the LAFED endorsed Gilbert Cedillo, general manager of SEIU Local 660, for a state Assembly seat from the heavily Latino downtown district of Los Angeles, which he won handily. In 2002, newly-minted Mexican-American citizens helped elected Fabian Núñez, former political director of the LAFED, to Sacramento against Chamber of Commerce opposition. Núñez later became speaker of the state Assembly. Key to these successes was the creation by Miguel Contreras and his allies of the Organization of Los Angeles Workers.

The Organization trained employees from HERE, UNITE, and SEIU to campaign on behalf of pro-labor candidates in specific districts through the use of phone banks, precinct walking, and advertising in the immigrant press. In June 2004, Eliseo Medina, who played a major role in devising this strategy, described the approach: “We would ... run paid media in the Spanish language press and use this to leverage Public Service Announcements (PSAs) with our nonpartisan message. We would then routinely invite news anchors and reporters to walk with our [ precinct ] teams and this would create a buzz, a drumbeat for our efforts. In this way, Labor became a partner with the community.”<sup>85</sup>

None of this activity meant that Latino workers and their allies in southern California could expect to improve, or even to maintain, their powerful position in local politics unless they secured the votes of large numbers of middle-class whites on the city’s West Side, or developed a political alliance with African Americans. The latter, given cultural and job tensions between the two groups, was far from being guaranteed.<sup>86</sup> Nor was this kind of labor-ethnic coalition necessarily foreign to the politics of the Bay Area. Working Partners USA (affiliated with the South Bay Labor Council in San Jose), the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (started by HERE in Oakland), and the Living Wage campaigns organized in the city of San Francisco itself, have all helped to elect candidates sympathetic to labor’s cause in recent northern California elections.<sup>87</sup>

But there was no equivalent in the Bay Area for the large, and growing, numbers of Mexican-American and other Latino working class voters who by 2005 had come to dominate more than a third of LA’s political space. Nor could there have been such an equivalent, given the enormous size of the Latino population in southern California. The most striking thing about labor-Latino candidates in Los Angeles elections since 1998 is that, besides maintaining their support in the old, working class barrios of East LA, they have steadily expanded their base of operations south into industrial cities. These areas include Vernon and Maywood, west into the downtown area, and regions of the San Fernando Valley where Latinos were – or are about to become – a majority of the electorate. In 2005, indeed, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa secured voting majorities in every one of the city’s council districts except

two.<sup>88</sup>

Of course, the 2001 and 2005 mayoral elections in Los Angeles were unusual, since for the first time in a hundred years they produced a Mexican-American candidate who had a real chance to win. As in the past, so in the future it will be necessary for LA's labor-Latino candidates to build coalitions with other progressive factions in order to get their candidates elected.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, a glance at the socio-economic profile of the voters who cast their ballots for Mayor Villaraigosa in 2005 suggests that his victory was based as much on considerations of class as it was on considerations of race or ethnicity. Besides gaining 84% of Los Angeles' Latino voters and 48% of its African Americans, Villaraigosa also got the votes of 78% of the city's union members, 72% of its liberal Democrats, 67% of its voters with incomes under \$20,000, and 64% of its voters with incomes between \$20,000 and \$39,000. According to federal guidelines, the latter sum was just above the poverty line for a family of four.<sup>90</sup>

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Can any long-term lessons be drawn from the recent revival of the San Francisco and Los Angeles labor movements which might be applicable nation-wide? In my view, the answer is "Probably Not." Some commentators have drawn an analogy between the backing given to the current labor revival by California's Asian and Latino immigrants and the support that was provided to the newly-founded CIO, and to the New Deal Democratic Party, by the thousands of Polish, Czech and Slovak factory workers who helped found the industrial unions of the 1930s. Such an "optimistic scenario," writes Ruth Milkman, "would be a reprise of the CIO era, when a burgeoning union movement served as the vehicle for second-generation immigrants to move up economically into the mainstream of American culture."<sup>91</sup>

On the surface, this historical analogy seems plausible. Even if the reasons for it differ, the economic divide that exists between rich and poor in today's California is as great, if not greater than, the divide between blue collar workers and "economic royalists" that existed during the New Deal years. A study of economic inequality in California in the 1990s showed that poverty was more widespread in the state than it was in America generally, and that a higher percentage of immigrant workers in Los Angeles were employed in low-wage jobs than they were in San Francisco, where the local economy created a higher proportion of upper-level, well-paid positions.<sup>92</sup> This declining position may constitute another reason why the LAFED has made such a determined effort to catch up with the San Francisco Council of Labor in recent years.

On the face of it, the analogy which Milkman drew between the support which second-generation Latinos provided to SEIU, HERE, and other "new unions" in 1990s California and the help which second-generation European immigrants gave to establishing industrial unions during the 1930s also appears to be well taken. Several studies of the emergence of unions such as the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the United Steelworkers during the CIO period report that second-generation southern and eastern European immigrants played a major role in their development.

In his account of the emergence of UAW Local 229 in Detroit in 1937, for example, Peter Friedlander contrasted the fear of reprisal which recently-arrived European workers at the Detroit

Parts Company showed during their early days at work, with the courage and militancy of second-generation, Polish shop floor leaders such as Edmund Kord.<sup>93</sup> A recent analysis of union growth in California also tells us that unionization rates tend to be higher among older and more experienced immigrants than they are among workers under the age of 25.<sup>94</sup> The praise which Eliseo Medina of SEIU, gave to the experienced Central American refugees who helped to revive LA's unions in the 1990s can be recalled here, and compared to the positive role played by second generation Polish workers in Friedlander's narrative.

One can also point to the fact that an increasing number of Los Angeles' present-day Latinos are anxious to become American citizens and, having registered to vote, are beginning to vote their economic interests in the same way that hundreds of thousands of second generation European immigrants in the 1930s did when they took out citizenship papers and voted for the New Deal Democratic party.<sup>95</sup> Given the parallels which exist between the class position of Mexican and other Latino immigrants in LA and in America's other large, so-called immigrant capitals, it is probable that a similar increase in the number of Latino voters will occur in places like New York, Chicago, Arizona, and Texas.<sup>96</sup> In those places, too, the recruitment of immigrant service workers such as Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, and Latinos of all kinds into SEIU and HERE have recently shown signs of success.<sup>97</sup>

It would be misleading, however, to carry the analogy between the union revival in 1990s California and the rise of the CIO in the 1930s too far. For one thing, social conditions today are completely different from what they were during the period of the New Deal. In 1936-37, unions were favorably regarded, federal legislation facilitating labor organizing was being passed by Congress, and both the AFL and the CIO were growing rapidly. In present-day California unions are unpopular, the welfare state is in decline, and the cultural climate has changed beyond all recognition. In the 1930s, employers, weakened by the Great Depression and by the excesses of the 1920s, were on the defensive. Today, the opposite is true. From the time of the air controllers strike under President Reagan in 1981 right up to the present time, employers have fought unionization with all the weapons at their command.<sup>98</sup>

Many other elements that were present in the social and economic equation during the mid-1930s are also lacking in America's present political climate. Perhaps the most important of these are the disappearance of old-fashioned, party political machines, the collapse of class-based concepts of popular culture, and the reversal that has occurred in public attitudes towards the positive role of the state. For instance, in the 1930s, the Democratic Party controlled by Chicago's Mayor Anton Cermak had more patronage jobs available with which to reward the faithful at election time than Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa did in 2005. Mayor Cermak's Democratic Party ward heelers were also able to provide its African American and European immigrants voters on the South Side of Chicago with material rewards in ways which are not permissible today.<sup>99</sup>

This loss of party discipline can be seen in the fact that, while large numbers of Latino voters may respond positively to the liberal message in LA's municipal elections, they cannot always be relied upon to vote Democratic at the national level.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, much of the faith which working class voters used to have in the state's ability to solve problems of poverty and social inequality has been lost. Evidence of this can be seen in the continuing popularity of the California anti-tax movement, which has proved to be just as attractive to working class families who live in rental

housing as it has to members of the suburban middle class.<sup>101</sup>

The concept of a class-specific counter culture, which acquired a widespread following through the activities of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration and the dissemination of radical plays, folk music, and working class novels in the 1930s, barely exists today. The growth of consumerism and the cooptation of worker-originated music and styles of dress by the affluent middle class have emasculated it still further.<sup>102</sup>

It is true that symbols of *Chicanismo* such as red bandanas, UFW-style flags, and the Spanish-language songs sung by supporters of SEIU and HERE contain some of the same cultural precepts. But these protest symbols tend to be race/ethnic-specific rather than class-specific. They lack the cross-ethnic appeal which working class, popular culture had during the 1930s.<sup>103</sup>

Finally, one of the accepted generalizations about the appeal of the CIO to second generation European immigrants in the 1930s and 1940s was that it enabled Italian, Slavic, and Polish blue-collar workers to move up in American society, and to become beneficiaries of the American dream. This mobility was possible because of the excellent wage rates and pension benefits that unions such as the UAW and the United Steelworkers were able to secure for their members.<sup>104</sup> However, because of changes associated with the higher level of education needed to succeed in today's labor market, as well the overall decline in working class standards of living since 1973, the possibility exists that large numbers of today's third world immigrants may not be able to proceed along the same path of upward mobility as their predecessors did. Instead, they may become stuck in unskilled, low-wage jobs at the bottom rungs of society.<sup>105</sup>

This possibility is hotly contested among today's sociologists and economists, and there is no consensus about what the eventual outcome will be.<sup>106</sup> But if, unlike the immigrant generation of the 1930s, California's current crop of immigrant workers proves itself unable to achieve incorporation into U.S. society, then its long-term motives for joining an expanding and reviving labor movement at the national level may indeed be called into question. Much depends here on the pace and character of future immigration from Mexico and elsewhere, on legislation currently being considered by Congress to deal with immigration, and on the future shape and direction of the U.S. economy.

This essay has offered an analysis of why, in recent years, the level of union density among southern California's workers has reached the same level as the one enjoyed by workers in San Francisco. Not surprisingly, this Latino-driven union activity has been accompanied by the election of more Mexican-American public officials in California, by the passage of more labor-friendly legislation in Sacramento, and by attempts to expand Living Wage laws, provide better schools, and create a larger stock of affordable housing. Whether the labor-Latino alliance will spread beyond California's borders to influence the entire country, or whether it will even be sustained in California itself for more than a brief period, is uncertain. But for the moment, the impact on state public policy and political outcomes is clear.



## Footnotes

1. Robert M. Fogelson, Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930, new ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). The best analysis of the dominance of the open shop in early Los Angeles remains Grace Heilman Stimpson, The Rise of the Labor Movement in Los Angeles (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), Chaps. 17-19.
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3. Ruth Milkman and Daisy Rooks, "California Union Membership: A Turn of the Century Portrait" (UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations, 2003), 20.
4. Ibid, 21-24.
5. *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 2006, p. A 14.
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8. For comparisons of the anti-Chinese movement as a source of white, working class solidarity in San Francisco and Los Angeles, see Alexander Saxton, The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), and Paul M De Falla, "Lantern in the Western Sky: Chinese Massacre in Los Angeles, 1871," in Doyce B. Nunis Jr., A Southern California Historical Anthology (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 1984), 155-188.
9. Fogelson, Fragmented Metropolis, Chaps. 4, 9; Douglas Monroy, Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles From the Great Migration to the Great Depression (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), Chap. 4.
10. Stimson, Rise of the Labor Movement, chaps. 8-9; Kazin, Barons of Labor, Chap. 4.
11. Stimpson, Rise of the Labor Movement, Chap. 22; Herbert Shapiro, "The McNamara Case: A Window on Class Antagonism in the Progressive Era," Southern California Quarterly, vol. LXX, no. 1 (Spring, 1988), 69-82. The bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* was a major national event of the era.

Originally, the McNamara brothers – arrested after the bombing – were assumed to be innocent by labor union supporters and a campaign to defend them was undertaken. Famed defense attorney Clarence Darrow was hired for the defense. But Darrow discovered the McNamara's were in fact guilty and the movement collapsed, undermining the mayoral campaign of Job Harriman – the Socialist candidate for mayor of LA who was thought to be the likely winner.

12. Kazin, Barons of Labor, Chaps, 2, 7.

13. Edward J Escobar, Race, Police, and the Making of A Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Police Department, 1900-1945 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 70-76; Douglas Flamming, Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), chap. 6.

14. Louis B. Perry and Richard S. Perry, A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), chaps. 11-15; Tom Sitton, Los Angeles Transformed: Fletcher Bowron's Urban Reform Revival, 1933-1953 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), chaps. 2-3; Report of the Commission of Education and Labor (Part 111), (Employer Associations and Collective Bargaining in California), (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942). The National Industrial Recovery Act was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court but was replaced by the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 whose constitutionality was later upheld. The 1935 Act guaranteed the right to collective bargaining.

15. Robert Zieger, The CIO, 1935-1955 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), Chap. 4; David Selvin, Sky Full of Storm: A Brief History of California Labor (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1975), chap. 10-11; Bruce Nelson, Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s (Urbana: University of Illinois, Press, 1988), chap. 5; Chris Rhomberg, 'No There, There': Race, Class, and Political Community in Oakland (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), chap. 3.

16. Zieger, The CIO, chap. 9; Charles P. Larrowe, Harry Bridges, The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States (New York: L. Hill, 1972), chaps. 10-14; Larry Ceplair and Stephen Englund, The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). The phrase "McCarthyism" refers to Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin who led various investigations of alleged communist infiltration.

17. Milkman and Rooks, "California Union Membership," p. 20.

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19. Dick Walker, "The Playground of U.S. Capitalism? The Political Economy of the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980s," in Mike Davis et al, Fire in the Hearth: The Radical Politics of Place

in America (London; Verso, 1990), 30-31.

20. Carol Zabin, Katie Quan, and Linda Delp, The State of California Labor (UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations, 2001), 2; Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr (eds.), Ethnic Los Angeles (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), chap. 4; Lonnie G. Bunch, “A Past Not Necessarily Prologue: The Afro-American in Los Angeles Since 1900,” in Norman Klein and Martin J. Schiesl (eds.), 20<sup>th</sup> Century Los Angeles: Power, Promotion, and Social Conflict (Claremont: Regina Books, 1991), 124-126; Rhomberg, ‘No There, There’, Chap. 6.
21. Walker, “Playground of U.S. Capitalism?,” 40-41.
22. Waldinger and Bozorgmehr (eds.), Ethnic Los Angeles, chap. 3.
23. Scott and (eds.), The City, 314-319.
24. Waldinger and Bozorgmehr (eds.), Ethnic Los Angeles, chap. 3.
25. Richard Edward DeLeon, Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975-1991 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 19.
26. Quoted by Rodwin and Sazanami (eds.), Deindustrialization, 93.
27. Detailed accounts of the Century City Justice for Janitors demonstration can be found in Ruth Milkman (ed.), Organizing Immigrants: The Challenge for Unions in Contemporary California (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), chap. 8; and in Kate Bronfenbrenner et al Organizing to Win: New Research in Union Strategies (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), chap. 6.
28. Milkman (ed.), Organizing Immigrants, chap. 6; Jose de Paz, “Organizing Ourselves: Drywallers’ Strike Holds Lessons for the Future of Labor Organizing,” Labor Research Review, no. 20 (1997), 25-32.
29. Milkman (ed.), Organizing Immigrants, chap. 6.
30. Carol Zabin et al, “Union Organizing in California: Challenges and Opportunities,” in The State of California Labor (UCLA Institute for Industrial Relations, 2001), 7-8.
31. DeLeon, Left Coast City, 27.
32. Zabin et al (eds.), “Union Organizing,” 9-10. Living Wage ordinances require government contractors and others dependent on government resources to pay wages substantially higher than the minimum wage. Card check procedures involve employer recognition of a union after a majority of workers in a unit sign union authorization cards – as opposed to formal union representation elections.
33. See, e.g., the accounts given of union growth in the airline, entertainment, construction, health care, hospitality, maritime, and retail industries in Daniel J.B. Mitchell, “California Labor

Relations: Background and Developments Through Mid-2002,” in The State of California Labor (UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations, 2002), 171-220.

34. Zabin et al (eds.), “Union Organizing in California,” 4-5; Linda Delp and Katie Quan, “Homecare Worker Organizing in California: An Analysis of A Successful Union Strategy,” Labor Studies Journal, vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring, 2002), 1-23. Prior to the SEIU’s new arrangement, the aides were hired by individual disabled persons. Under the new arrangement, hiring is nominally through a central entity, thus giving the aides a common employer.

35. Liz McNichol, “Fighting on Many Fronts: SEIU in Los Angeles,” Labor Research Review , no. 15 (1992), 37-43.

36. Milkman and Rooks, “California Union Membership,” 6.

37. Ibid, 24.

38. Ibid, 20.

39. Ibid, 6.

40. Mitchell, “California Labor Relations,” 173. See also Edna Bonacich and Richard F. Applebaum (eds.), Behind the Label: Inequality in the Los Angeles Apparel Industry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), passim.

41. In 1933, ILGWU Vice President Rose Pesotta led a strike of Latina garment workers in Los Angeles and organized several hundred of them into the union, demonstrating that it was racial and gender prejudice on the part of the male, white leaders of the union, not indifference on the part of the immigrant dressmakers, that was the reason why they had not previously been unionized. See John H.M. Laslett, “Gender, Class, or Ethno-Cultural Struggle? The Problematic Relationship Between Rose Pesotta and the Los Angeles ILGWU,” California History, no. 43 (Spring, 1993), 191-210.

42. Marta Lopez-Garcia and David R. Diaz (eds.), Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy: The Metamorphosis of Southern California (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 60-61; DeLeon, Left Coast City, 217.

43. Turner et al (eds.), Rekindling the Movement, 114-116.

44. The literature on working conditions in the electronics industry in northern California is extensive. See Stephen J. Pitti, The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race and Mexican Americans (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); David Naguib Pellow and Lisa Sun Hee Park, The Silicon Valley of Dreams: Environmental Injustice, Immigrants Workers, and the High-The Global Economy (New York: New York University Press, 2002); and Glenda Mathews, Silicon Valley: Women, and the American Dream: Gender, Class, and Opportunity in the Twentieth Century (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). The literature on the industry in Southern California is less extensive, but see Allen J. Scott, “High Technology and Territorial Development: The Rise of the

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45. Aladi Venkatash, “Changing Consumption Patterns,” in Rob Kling et al (eds.), Posturban California: The Transformation of Orange County Since World War II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1001), 150-157.

46. Mathews, Silicon Valley, 168-171; Scott, “High Technology,” Tables 3,5.

47. Karen J. Hossfeld, “Why Aren’t The High-Tech Workers Organized? Lessons in Gender, Race, and Nationality from Silicon Valley,” in Daniel Cornford (ed.), Working People of California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 417.

48. Milkman and Rooks, “California Union Membership,” 22.

49. Kate Bronfenbrenner and Tom Juravich, Union Organizing in the Public Sector: An Analysis of State and Local Elections (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1995), 1-2.

50. Milkman and Rooks, “California Union Membership,” 22.

51. Lowell Turner and Richard W. Hurd, “Building Social Movement Unionism: The Transformation of the American Labor Movement,” in Lowell Turner et al (eds.), Rekindling the Movement: Labor’s Quest for Relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2001), 9-26.

52. In February, 2000, the AFL-CIO announced that it would seek to have the employer sanctions in IRCA repealed, that it favored federal amnesty for most undocumented workers, and that it would do its best to organize them into unions. See Vernon M. Briggs, Immigration and American Unionism (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2001), 167-168.

53. Turner, et al (eds.), Rekindling the Movement, Chap. 7.

54. Hector Delgado, New Immigrants, Old Unions: Organizing Undocumented Workers in Los Angeles (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 124-125. Note, however, that this right to organize was somewhat compromised by a subsequent NLRB ruling that employers were not required to reinstate undocumented workers even if they had been fired for activity that was protected by the National Labor Relations Act.

55. Ibid, chap. 2.

56. Ruth Needleman, “Women Workers: A Force for Rebuilding Unionism ,” Labor Research Review, no. 11 (1988), 1-13; Norma M. Riccuci, Women, Minorities, and Unions in the Public Sector (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), passim.

57. David E. Gray, “Militancy, Unionism, and Gender Ideology: A Study of Hospital Nurses,” Work and Occupations, vol. 16, no. 2 (May, 1989), 137-152.

58. Needleman, "Women Workers," 5. Note, however, that SEIU District 925 was disbanded in 2001 and replaced by Local 925. Although Local 925 no longer makes organizing women its main objective, its membership and organizing targets are overwhelmingly female.
59. Milkman and Rooks, "California Union Membership," 14.
60. Turner, et al (eds.), Rekindling the Movement, 108.
61. Zabin et al, "Union Organizing in California," 6-7.
62. Patricia Lee, "Asian Immigrant Women and HERE Local 2," Labor Research Review, no. 11 (1988), 34-35.
63. Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Seeking Community: Guatemalans and Salvadorans in A Global City (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 51; James P. Allen and Eugene Turner (eds.), The Ethnic Quilt: Population Diversity in Southern California (Northridge: CSUN Center for Geographical Studies, 1997), 101-102.
64. Hamilton and Chinchilla, Seeking Community, 84.
65. Quoted in *ibid*, 86.
66. Diana W. Hart, Undocumented in LA, An Immigrant's Story (Wilmington: SR Books, 1997), *passim*; *Los Angeles Times* (1/9/84, 3/4/84, 3/15/84, 5/9/84, 7/23/84, 9/15/84, 3/1/85, 2/19/85, 5/29/85, 6/4/85, 8/12/85, 1/19/86, 8/11/86 plus an additional eight refs. to the role of Central American refugees in LA union activity; *San Francisco Chronicle* (8/0/84, 12/11/84, 9/8/85, 9/12/85, 3/2/86, 6/6/86), plus another six references to the role of Central American refugees in San Francisco union activity.
67. Frederick M. Wirt, Power in the City: Decision Making in San Francisco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 175-176. See also F.O. Wright, "What Is Middle About the Middle Class?" in J Roemer (ed.), Analytical Marxism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 130-131.
68. Paul Johnston, Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace (Ithaca, ILR Press, 1994), 178-181.
69. Richard E. DeLeon and Sandra S. Powell, "Growth Control and Electoral Politics: The Triumph of Urban Populism in San Francisco," Western Political Quarterly, vol. 42, no. 2 (June, 1989), 307. See also John H. Mollenknopf, The Contested City (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
70. DeLeon, Left Coast City, 33.
71. Raphael Sonenshein, Politics on Black and White, Race and Power in Los Angeles

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 246-248.

72. On this shift in political culture, see Adolph Reed Jr. "The 2004 Election in Perspective: The Myth of 'Cultural Divide' and the Triumph of Neoliberal Ideology," American Quarterly, vol. 57, no. 1 (March, 2005), 1-15. In 1976 the San Francisco Police Department estimated that "about 140,000 gays lived in San Francisco, over one in five citizens." See Randy Shilts, The Mayor of Castro Street, The Life and Times of Harvey Milk (New York: St. Martins Press, 1982), 115.

73. Walker, "The Playground of U.S. Capitalism," 61.

74. Deleon, Left Coast City, 132-138; Sonenshein, Politics on Black and White, 254-257.

75. *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 15, 1999, p. 1.

76. Chris Carlsson (ed.), The Political Edge (San Francisco: City Lights Foundation, 2004), 110.

77. *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 2001, p. A4; March 10, 2005, p. A1, May 18, 2005, p. A1.

78. Ibid, May 19, 2005, p. A3.

79. Ibid, May 23, 2005, p. B1.

80. Loc. cit.; Robert Gottlieb et al, The Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 159.

81. Gottlieb, et al, The Next Los Angeles, 160.

82. *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 2006, p. A19.

83. Gottlieb, et al, The Next Los Angeles, 161.

84. Loc cit.

85. Quoted in Larry Frank and Kent Wong, "Dynamic Political Mobilization: The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor," in Working USA, vol. 8, no. 2 (December, 2004), 165.

86. Considerable mistrust emerged in the 1980s and 1990s between the Latino and African American communities in Los Angeles because the rapid growth of the Mexican population has threatened black influence over jobs, housing, and political offices in areas of the city which they had been accustomed to control. See Sonenshein, Politics in Black and White, Chaps 9-10; and Gottlieb, et al, The Next Los Angeles, 167-168.

87. Carol Zabin, Katie Quan and Linda Delp, "Union Organizing in California: Challenges and Opportunities," The State of California Labor (UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations, 2001), 10-12.

88. *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 2005, p. A1.
89. Sonenshein, Politics in Black and White, 214-215.
90. *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 2005, p. B2.
91. Milkman (ed.), Organizing Immigrants, 12.
92. Ruth Milkman and Rachel E. Dwyer, "Growing Apart: The 'New Economy' and Job Polarization in California, 1992-2000," The State of California Labor (UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations, 2002), passim. The phrase "economic royalists" was used by President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s to describe the super-rich of that era.
93. Peter Friedlander, The Emergence of A UAW Local, 1936-1939: A Study in Class and Culture (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975), Chap. 2. See also John Bodnar, Immigration and Industrialization. Ethnicity in An American Mill Town, 1870-1940 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).
94. Milkman and Rooks, "California Union Membership," 16.
95. Thomas J. Archdeacon, Becoming American, An Ethnic History (New York: Free Press, 1983), chap. 7. See also Gary Gerstle, Working Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in A Textile City (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1-15.
96. Roger Waldinger (ed.), Strangers at the Gates: New Immigrants in Urban America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), Chap. 4.
97. Turner et al, Rekindling the Movement, passim.
98. Kim Moody, An Injury to All: The Decline of American Labor (New York: Verso, 1988), Chap. 6. Strikes by federal workers are illegal. In 1981, President Reagan fired striking air traffic controllers and replaced them with other workers.
99. Lizabeth Cohen, Making A New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 255-256. Mayor Cermak was killed in an assassination attempt on President-Elect Franklin Roosevelt.
100. Reed, "The 2004 Election in Perspective," 1-15.
101. Lenny Goldberg, Taxation With Representation: A Citizen's Guide to Reforming Proposition 13 (Sacramento: California Tax Reform Association, 1991), Chap. 1.
102. Michael Denning, The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century (New York: Verso, 1996), 314-321.
103. *Ibid*, 318-319.

104. Nelson Lichtenstein, The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor (New York: Basic Books, 1995), Chap. 12.
105. Vilma Ortiz, "The Mexican-Origin Population: Permanent Working Class or Emerging Middle Class?," in Waldinger and Bozorgmehr, Ethnic Los Angeles, Chap. 9.
106. See the differing views expressed on this matter by contributors to Waldinger (ed.), Strangers at the Gates.