False Dawn? Los Angeles Labor's Recent Growth and Future Prospects

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2011
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January 2011
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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2006 sociologist Ruth Milkman reported that union density in Southern California (the proportion of unionized workers per head of the population) which historically lagged behind the level in most of America’s other, major industrial cities, reached 17% of the Los Angeles workforce. This was only half a dozen percentage points behind the density level in strongly unionized cities such as Seattle, Detroit, and Pittsburgh. The increase came as a surprise to many labor experts, because it occurred at a time when the union trend in most other parts of the country was turning relentlessly down.

A year earlier, in May, 2005, Los Angeles labor won a political victory when it helped elect former United Teachers of LA union organizer Antonio Villagairosa mayor of the city - the first Mexican American to be elected to that office in over a hundred years. By that date four of the fifteen members of the Los Angeles City Council were former union officers, and over forty Mexican American activists with ties to the labor movement had been elected to city, county, and state-wide offices.

Confirming the upward trend, the Los Angeles Times reminded its readers that until the 1930s Southern California’s workers had been in the grip of the country’s most virulent open shop movement. “Today, however”, the paper continued, “the city’s historic, Republican, anti-labor politics have given way to the opposite”. With an energized labor force and a powerful civil rights movement, Los Angeles had become “a model for labor organizing in the United States”.4.
This paper answers three basic questions. First, how and why did this apparently anomalous revival in the Southern California labor movement take place? Second, did it – or could it still - portend a long-term, upward shift in the fortunes of LA’s trade unions? And thirdly was the revival, as the most recent evidence seems to suggest, a false dawn: a relatively minor upturn in union fortunes which is now largely over and which has no chance of helping to reverse the U.S. labor movement’s long-standing trajectory of seemingly remorseless decline?

2. UNION GROWTH AMONG LA’S MEXICAN SERVICE WORKERS

The beginning of the union revival in Southern California is frequently attributed to the series of marches and demonstrations of immigrant office cleaners from SEIU Local 399 ( better known as the Justice for Janitors campaign ) which took place in the summer of 1990. These marches culminated in a celebrated clash with the LAPD at Century City on June 15, 1990, at which several people were hurt. The beatings attracted public sympathy and they prompted Mayor Tom Bradley to hold a press conference at which he called for an official enquiry. This favorable publicity helped persuade International Office Systems ( ISS ), a Danish-owned cleaning company that owned several of the hotels in the Century City complex, to sign a contract with SEIU Local 399 which granted union recognition and raised the wages of its employees5. It was a major breakthrough.

The Century City victory, however, was not the first time that SEIU had deployed its new, direct action techniques to organize low-paid service workers. That effort had begun several years earlier in Detroit and Pittsburgh when the Service Employees International Union - America’s largest - centralized its leadership, committed additional funds to organizing, and trained a new cadre of organizers who reached out to neighborhood communities for support. SEIU’s new approach to organizing also included also public acts of civil disobedience, research
into the strength and weaknesses of targeted employers, and circumventing the NLRB’s cumbersome rules for processing union elections.

Not long after the 1990 confrontation at Century City, additional momentum was given to LA’s union upsurge when 1,200 undocumented immigrant workers at the American Racing Equipment Company (a manufacturer of bicycle wheel rims based in Compton) engaged in a five-day, unauthorized walkout to protest job cuts and low pay. In December 1990 they joined the International Association of Machinists, and six months later secured their first union contract. Then, in the summer of 1992, 4,000 Mexican drywall workers, most of whom were also in the country illegally, left their jobs at construction sites throughout the city to protest low wages and poor working conditions. As result of this unofficial walk-out the Carpenters Union signed up over thirty, new building contractors to a basic drywall contract which granted the strikers full benefits and almost tripled their wages.

Drawing from the same, huge pool of undocumented immigrants in the Los Angeles labor force, Local 11 of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers (which organized porters, housekeepers, dishwashers and food servers in the city’s hotels), UNITE (which represented former members of the ILGWU and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers), and several other predominantly Mexican unions adopted many of the same organizing techniques as SEIU. Using Spanish-speaking volunteers, union organizers carried their message into workers’ homes in East LA, and secured support from sympathetic clergy in the LA Catholic diocese headed by Archbishop Patrick Mahoney. Following in the footsteps of the old ILGWU (which was soon to unite with the hotel and restaurant workers in UNITE-HERE) union officials also encouraged the organization of female employees, championed social justice issues such as health clinics, better schools, and improved welfare benefits, and encouraged their immigrant members to
become citizens and vote in local elections9.

In 1992 HERE Local 11 conducted a ten-month boycott against the Koreana Hotel in downtown Los Angeles at which it mixed union organizing with political action. It persuaded Asian visitors not to use the hotel for meetings, urged its Mexican members to vote in local elections, and conducted a sit-in at the Korean consulate. Not long afterwards the Koreana Hotel signed a contract with the union. HERE’s Local 814 in Santa Monica used similar, direct action tactics when it staged hotel lobby sit-ins and conducted acts of civil disobedience outside local hotels. On one occasion Local 814 drew on the traditions of Mexico’s teatro campesino when it brought seven or eight neatly dressed chambermaids from a local hotel out onto the sidewalk. Having been personally introduced to the crowd, the maids hastily made up a number of mock beds right there in the street to demonstrate the work pressures they were under. Locals 814 also challenged Santa Monica’s anti-union Hotel Employers Council by distributing a controversial video showing how low-wage jobs undermined the level of service in the city’s hotels and urging hotel owners to raise wages for the benefit of the community as a whole10.

By the turn of the century these new tactics, coupled with more traditional forms of union pressure, had won a series of new contracts and increased the membership of SEIU Local 399 by over 4,000 members. Local 11’s membership also grew, although by a smaller amount11. Overall, a 2008 review of the local labor scene estimated that the new burst of union activity had put a halt to the seemingly relentless decline of the AFL-CIO in Southern California “Both in the state and in the LA metropolitan area”, the report stated, “the rate of unionization has edged significantly upwards in the past few years. The 2008 unionization level [ ie, the union density rate ] is 17.0 per cent in the LA metropolitan area, up from 15.9 per cent in 2007. … Los Angeles currently has an estimated 1,227,600 members, or nearly half of the 2,633,600 union members in
the state of California. California in turn accounts for about 16 per cent of all the nation’s union members, more than any other state”11. Optimists even suggested that LA’s new brand of immigrant organizing could help to reverse labor decline in other parts of the country, to which large numbers of undocumented Mexican service workers were also moving13.

3. CORE REASONS FOR THE UNION UPSURGE.

The main reason for the emergence of the so-called ‘new unionism’ in Southern California, which also influenced the Bay Area, was the rising economic and political consciousness of immigrant workers from Mexico, Central America, and – to some extent – from southeast Asia who had settled in LA during the preceding decades14. This awakening represented the culmination of an historical process which stretched back over several generations. It began with the Mexican tracklayers’ strike of 1903, drew nourishment from the Magonistas and the other nationalist movements during the Mexican revolution, re-emerged in the famous strike of ILGWU garment workers in 1933, and reaped its first political rewards with the election of Mexican American civil rights activist Edward Roybal to the LA City Council in 1949. Along the way, the immigrants discarded the home-country loyalties of many first generation Mexicans, digested the ‘becoming Mexican American’ process discussed by George Sanchez in his 1993 book on the subject, and reached a new plateau of self confidence after the civil rights movement of the 1960s14.

Sociologist Ruth Milkman succinctly summarized three additional reasons for the union upsurge: the “shared experience of stigmatization” (ie, the alienation that many undocumented Mexican workers felt from U.S. society); the “stronger social networks” that existed among them compared to LA’s white workers; and what she called the “immigrant political experience”15. By this Milkman meant the growing participation of Latino voters in LA’s civic
life and the recent arrival in Southern California of a group of radical activists from Central America who had either been victims of right-wing, military dictatorships in El Salvador and elsewhere, or had helped to organize unions in their native countries.

These three reasons make sense. Milkman was right to juxtapose the strong sense of communal solidarity among Mexican workers with the weaker sense of solidarity which existed among LA’s white suburbanites. “Among the native-born [ white ] population”, Milkman writes, neighbors and co-workers rarely know one another well; transience, fragmentation, and instability are the norm”. These ethno-cultural differences in community behavior ( which are documented in Robert Fogelson’s Fragmented Metropolis ), may also account for the contrast that emerged between the relative mildness of white-dominated factory protest in LA during the CIO period of the 1930s and the greater militancy of workers of color in recent years.

There are several additional reasons for the union upsurge which Milkman could have cited. They include the organizing legacy left by Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers ( UFW ), the discovery by undocumented workers that it was legal for them to join unions, and the increased willingness of Latina women to take on leadership roles in organizing campaigns.

Many of the tactics which LA’s service unions adopted in the 1990s were directly influenced by the organizing traditions of the UFW. The use of union boycotts, for example, which Cesar Chavez made famous during the UFW boycott of non-union grapes in the 1970s, became a standard organizing weapon of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union when it exerted pressure on non-union hotels. So, too, did the use of civil disobedience and street theater as a way of educating the public and drawing attention to workers’ grievances. Equally important were the alliances which the immigrant unions developed with the Catholic clergy. Most of the clergy-labor alliances that were forged in LA during the 1990s were based directly on the
example of the Migrant Ministry in rural California which supported the organizing demands of farm workers in the 1960 and 1970s 19.

The realization by undocumented immigrants that it was not illegal for them to join unions was also significant. In legal terms, the right of undocumented workers to join unions was established in California in 1988 by the U.S. Court of Appeals (in Patel v. Quality Inn South), which found that their right to organize was protected by federal labor law 20. That legal opinion was somewhat esoteric, and it did not readily filter down to the rank and file. More important was the evidence gathered by Hector Delgado for his 1993 book on the subject. Delgado documented a successful organizing campaign carried out in the 1980s by the ILGWU to unionize the Camagua Mattress Co., a waterbed company in East LA. Virtually all of Camagua’s employees were undocumented, but Delgado’s interviews showed that very few of them were deterred from joining the union by fear of deportation. One worker stated that “the chances of being surveyed or raided is very, very small”. Another shrugged off the deportation issue by saying that, “You expect them to send you back. … If they send me back, I’ll return”. Still a third Camagua worker said that he had a “better chance of being hit by a car [than of being arrested] – and he didn’t worry about [that], either” 21.

Delgado concluded that undocumented workers’ fear of ‘la migra’ did not make them any more difficult to organize than native-born employees or immigrant workers who already had their citizenship papers. Fear of being deported may have continued to deter some undocumented immigrants until after the U.S. Court of Appeals found in their favor. But as more and more of them joined unions in the early 1990s without suffering any penalty, their fear of arrest continued to decline 22.

4. MOBILIZATION OF CHICANA WOMEN.
A final, highly significant reason for the re-emergence of union militancy among immigrant workers in the 1990s – which Milkman unaccountably missed – was the assertiveness of emancipated Chicanas who rejected the patriarchalism of traditional Mexican culture and embraced a leadership role in LA’s unions. By 1980 Latinas constituted over forty per cent of the janitorial workforce in Southern California and an even higher proportion of the housekeepers, maids, and dishwashers who worked in the hotel and restaurant trades. If the organizing campaigns of SEIU Local 399, HERE Local 11, and other service unions were to succeed, the support of these Latina workers was essential. So it is important that this cultural shift be properly understood. Who were the female union organizers of the 1990s, and how did they overcome the traditional reluctance of male, union leaders to share power?

By the late eighties precedents already existed for women of Mexican descent to take leadership roles in the Los Angeles labor movement. Besides Maria Elena Durazo, now head of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, and Dolores Huerta as veteran leader of the UFW, more than a dozen Chicanas had already secured second level leadership positions in the female-dominated ILGWU. A significant minority of the women who helped lead the Justice for Janitors campaign also came from Central America, where they had prior experience of battling with employers in politically repressive regimes. Out of a sample of forty-two women studied by Cynthia Cranford in her excellent thesis on the subject, 9% hailed from Guatemala and as many as 23% came from El Salvador. Few details are available about the experiences of these women before they came to the U.S. Nevertheless it is reasonable to assume that the leadership qualities they displayed in LA derived partly from their prior experiences in Central America.

Another important reason for the emergence of a new cadre of female organizers was the commitment of their national trade unions to leadership training programs for women. In LA the
most influential training program was offered by SEIU, which was so successful that by the turn of the century Latina women had been appointed, or elected, to almost half of the leadership positions in janitor’s Local 1877.26.

These gender advances were not won without a fight. This was because educating immigrant women for union leadership involved not just teaching them how to service a union contract or deal with intransigent employers. It also meant challenging deeply ingrained male habits of dominance both in the workplace and the home. The first task of union leaders who set out to train women for positions of leadership was to persuade them of the value of doing so – a goal that was not always obvious to women who came from rural, Catholic backgrounds. Several of the women interviewed by Cynthia Cranford reported that their interest in unionism was first piqued, not by the desire for gender equality but by the idea that it would relieve them of the feelings of isolation that new immigrants often experience in an alien society. Delia, a janitor and mother of four children, described her initial hesitancy. “I say the union takes you out of the closet because it’s like being locked up. … And in our countries, politics is almost always left to the men. Few women participate. So you ignore these things; politics doesn’t interest you. To organize? Forget it! But here, suddenly, I have done a million things”27.

The next task was to persuade the husbands and sons of LA’s low-paid workers that women’s involvement was desirable because of the need to protect the interests of the immigrant family, for example by including demands for health care and other family benefits in union negotiations. Health care was sometimes seen by men as a ‘women’s issue’ which did not concern them. But by presenting union organizing as a family issue, it became clear to the men as well as to women that the provision of health care was essential if the immigrant worker’s family and his children were to be properly protected28.
The fight for a living wage fell into a similar category. A single immigrant worker earning minimum wage in the 1970s and 1980s could not support a wife, let alone several children. For those with access to grandparents or other members of an extended family the combined income of a man and woman might make it possible for a married couple to get by. But for those women who were divorced, had lost their partners, or had no extended family available to them a living wage (ie, a wage capable of sustaining a man, his wife, and two children) was indispensable if they were to support their families by themselves. This fact, in itself, provided an incentive for women to get involved in their union locals.

In each of these ways training Latinas for leadership pushed the activities of the service unions in a more family-oriented, feminist direction. Most union men readily agreed with the programmatic goals of these changes. But at first they quite often resisted the threat to their prerogatives which arose when their wives and daughters began asserting their right to participate in union meetings, still more when they ran for union office. Lupita, another Salvadoran emigre, reported that when she asked her husband to clean the house so that she could go to a union meeting he refused, saying that if he did so he would be regarded by his workmates as a ‘mandilon’—a slave to his wife.

But because SEIU’s Justice for Janitors training program had already developed a culture of women’s participation before it came to Southern California, and because its program made a deliberate effort to deal with these issues, male resistance to the advancement of women appears to have broken down more quickly in Los Angeles than it did in a number of other cities. When Cynthia Cranford probed more deeply into gender relations in Local 1877 in the mid-1990s she found that an increasing number of men had come to accept women as equals within the union. In 1998 Sylvia, an immigrant Latina who had been elected not just to one but to several union
committees – and was, therefore, in a good position to judge - summarized the new situation this way: “Those of us on the committees now, we are working together well. And the men give the women the opportunity, as we women give the men. I think that we are winning this. In the committees, we are very much on the same level”31.

5. THE GROWING POWER OF LA’S PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS.

It was not just first generation service workers’ unions which flourished in the 1990s; established white collar public employee unions, which often contained second generation immigrants with some education, grew rapidly as well. A survey published in December 2003 showed that the three largest unions in the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor were SEIU 434B (with 74,000 homecare and nursing home workers), SEIU 399 (with 45,000 health care and other employees), and the United Teachers of Los Angeles (with 30,000 teachers from the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association)32. This study also confirmed the large - and growing - gap that existed between the relative success of trade unionism in the public sector of the Southern California economy, and the ongoing weakness of unions in private industry. Another survey, taken in 2001, showed that as many as 56.4% of LA’s public employees (most of them teachers and health care workers) had become union members by that time, compared to only 9.4% of the workers in the private sector33. These proportions were quite similar to those which existed elsewhere in the U.S.

Unions like UTLA and AFSCME (clerical and state workers) had been growing rapidly in Southern California, just as they had all over the U.S. before the revival in service private sector unionism began in the early 1990s. This was partly because of the relatively liberal legal reforms regarding public sector unionism that had been adopted at both the state and federal level twenty years earlier34. There were other reasons, besides labor law, which made it easier
to organize unions in the public rather than the private sector. The most important of them stemmed from the fact that the services provided by state and city employees, which are indispensable to the public welfare, are run by government officials who are directly responsible to the electorate. Hence any breakdown in health services or fire services resulting from, say, a county hospital or a firemen’s strike, exposes local politicians to the wrath of the voters in ways which rarely occur in private business.

In addition, unlike private employers who have to keep their labor costs down if they are to make a profit, elected officials have no inherent reason to be anti-union. This does not mean, of course, that all publicly elected officials are pro union, any more than the general public is. In 1978, for example, LA voters adopted a proposition which authorized the Board of Supervisors to contract out government services to private companies when they believed it was “more economical” to do so. Nevertheless, once a legal framework was established permitting city, state, and county employees to engage in collective bargaining public employee unions grew much more rapidly than did unions in the private sector.

The more rapid growth of public compared to private sector unions does not mean that public sector organizers did not have to struggle with state and municipal governments to secure union recognition. Among LA’s teachers, for example, disputes over professionalism, community control, and affirmative action frequently led to conflict with city and county authorities, just as they did elsewhere. So, too, did jurisdictional rivalries between local affiliates of the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. In 1978 the passage of Proposition 13 limiting property taxes by California voters began an era of conflict over school funding between the unions and county and state governments which has grown increasingly serious with the passage of time. We shall return to this point later on. Nevertheless,
by the turn of the century the United Teachers of Los Angeles had become one of the most powerful unions in the LACFL.37.

Until the early 1990s when the janitors and other groups split off to form their own unions, SEIU Local 399 was a large multi-occupational organization which included clerical and office workers, leisure industry employees, social workers and librarians in its ranks. Its core membership, though, consisted of hospital workers “in every medical vocation”38, on whose behalf it negotiated contracts covering wages, health insurance, pensions, and other benefits with over forty public and private hospitals ranging from Kaiser Permanente to the City of Hope Medical Center in the five-county Southern California region. As the largest service employees’ local in the region, it battled with a wide range of government agencies to provide job security for its members39.

Labor’s most stunning victory among public sector employees came in 1999, when 74,000 homecare workers in Los Angeles county voted to join SEIU Local 434B. On the face of it these home care workers, most of whom were poor African American, Latina, and Filipino women, were privately employed domestics who assisted elderly couples in their homes. How could they be made to qualify as public employees? The answer lies in some shrewd political maneuvering carried out by SEIU Local 434B and its political allies in LA and Sacramento, which took more than ten years to complete. In 1991 Local 434B managed to persuade the state legislature to define California’s counties as employers of record for homecare workers. Under the Personal Care Option Act sponsored by Assemblywoman Gwen Moore, they also secured $800 million in federal funds from Medicaid so that these workers could be paid a decent wage. In addition, the union worked to persuade the LA County Board of Supervisors, which was responsible for paying home care workers, to act as their bargaining agent. At first it refused to
do so but in September 1997, after several lawsuits, the Board finally agreed to negotiate on their behalf.

Most individual domestic workers, however, including the maids and live-in housekeepers who worked in white, suburban homes, continued to be employed in the private rather than the public sector of the economy. In answer to this, the union established the Domestic Workers’ Association, which hired immigrant outreach workers to distribute novelas - cartoon pamphlets written in Spanish - along with notices of meetings and social events in supermarkets and public parks where nannies and other domestic workers congregated, to inform them of their rights. They also handed out advisory materials on LA’s east-west city buses which carried thousands of Latina maids, housekeepers, cleaners, and nurses to and from their jobs in Beverly Hills and West Los Angeles. In 1994 the Association held a series of training seminars for domestic workers in local Catholic churches which taught the participants how to file a claim for back pay, how to run public meetings, and how to redefine their status so that they could qualify as public employees.

“These were exciting and spirited meetings”, wrote one observer. When they ended each of the members went through a graduation ceremony and was given a certificate of personal accomplishment. Here was an additional cadre of undocumented women who were proud of their achievements and have since taught others that joining a union could help them live a life of dignity and self-respect in their adopted country.

6. MIGUEL CONTRERAS AND THE RISE OF A NEW, LABOR-LATINO POLITICAL ALLIANCE, 1996-2005

Much of the union effort spent in enrolling public employees during the 1980s and 1990s was devoted to determining the applicability of federal, state, and municipal regulations.
concerning Workmen’s Compensation, Social Security, Unemployment Insurance and other statutes to the populations they were trying to organize. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find that a second, indispensable element in the growing power of labor in California in the post 1990 period was the growing influence of Mexicans (and other minority groups, including Asians and African Americans) in the electoral arena.43

Like unions throughout the U.S. since the New Deal, the LACFL’s Committee on Political Education (COPE) had for years maintained a political alliance with the Democratic party. Besides influencing the City Council, this arrangement had succeeded in electing several progressive city mayors, including Fletcher Bowron (1938-1953), and Tom Bradley (1973-1993). But with the passage of time the alliance faltered, owing partly to the defection of ‘Reagan Democrats’ to the Republican party in the 1980s and partly to the increasing reliance of Democratic party stalwarts on routine TV ads. and so-called ‘checkbook politics’ to win elections. As one critic put it: “Labor in Los Angeles … paid a price for its close relationship with the … Bradley administration, as it became accustomed to operating largely without a field mobilization capacity”44.

In mid-1995, however, the LACFL’s white Executive Secretary-Treasurer, Jim Wood, unexpectedly died. The election of his successor gave the immigrant-based unions their first chance at top-level power, so they ran Miguel Contreras as their candidate. Wood’s predecessor as Secretary-Treasurer, Anglo labor leader Bill Robertson, opposed this move, saying that: “Contreras is not qualified. Period”45. But despite the racial overtones of the campaign Contreras won the May, 1996, election, bringing a Latino to power as head of the LACFL for the first time. This led to the revitalization of the Southern California Democratic party and to the creation of a union-based, Labor-Latino political alliance which (in conjunction with Democratic
Governor Gray Davis has compelled the state legislature in Sacramento to adopt much progressive labor legislation in the past fifteen years.

At age 41 Contreras proved to be the ideal leader to fashion this new, broadly-based political coalition. He had been appointed political director of the LACFL in 1994, and when he became its secretary-treasurer he placed increased emphasis on the need for Mexican immigrants to vote in state and local elections. Some of LA’s Latinos already voted Democratic because of traditional immigrant support for the party and because of the registration drives undertaken by the (Saul Alinsky inspired) Community Services Organization sponsored by Councilman Edward Roybal in the 1940s and 1950s. But many recent immigrants still neglected to secure their citizenship papers, a situation which Contreras and his union supporters set out to change.

The efforts of the unions to get Mexicans to vote in LA’s city elections was aided by immigrant anger at the passage of anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in 1994, and at the openly nativist campaigns carried out by Republican Governor Pete Wilson during his terms in office. Anti-immigrant sentiments, manifested in demands to militarize the Mexican border and deny welfare benefits to the undocumented, also showed up in state and federal elections. In the presidential election of 1996, for example, Republican candidate Bob Dole linked anti-immigrant sentiment with opposition to the policy of affirmative action. In response (despite their doubts about President Clinton’s soundness on the welfare issue) eighty per cent of LA’s eligible Latinos voted to re-elect him in November 1996 – the best performance by any Democratic presidential candidate in Southern California since Hubert Humphrey ran in 1968.

In the late 1990s, Miguel Contreras and his staff set about increasing the number of Mexican voters still further. They resurrected the door-to-door voter registration drives that had proved effective twenty years earlier, established workshops to help immigrants apply for
citizenship, and made a special effort to attract so-called ‘intermittent voters’, a group that included many Mexican Americans. By the turn of the century the LACFL was fielding several hundred full-time precinct walkers at election time, concentrating their attention on union families in specific wards downtown and in East LA. Most of these new precinct workers were union members, called “paid loss timers” who were compensated for their time away from work with money provided by SEIU and other labor bodies. By 2005 the city-wide Latino vote had risen in councilmanic elections from under 10,000 in 1992 to 27,500.50.

Emphasizing community involvement, the LACFL’s political staff also raised political consciousness by getting Mexican families in East LA to treat the act of voting as a social duty. Door-to-door volunteers prevailed on Mexican voters to sign forms stating that they were “Por la amnistia, por derechos, mi familia vota 100 porcento [For amnesty, for rights, my family voting is voting 100 per cent.]” As one volunteer put it: “We tried to make everything a family act to magnify the work and make it resonate”51. This effort was also linked to the unions’ attempts to enhance the role of women in the movement.

Besides boosting the number of Mexican union leaders who were elected to political office, Contreras and his staff staked out their political independence from traditional Democratic party leaders by substituting their own nominees for machine candidates, even when this meant opposing other Latinos. For example, at a special election for the state legislature held in 1997 in East LA Contreras ran the general manager of SEIU Local 660, Gilbert Cedillo, for state Assembly against the ‘establishment’ Latina candidate, Vickie Castro. Cedillo won handsomely partly because he had helped to save the nearby County General Hospital, which many Boyle Heights families relied on for their health care needs, from bankruptcy.52

Gilbert Cedillo’s come-from-behind victory shocked LA’s political establishment
and served notice that Contreras and his supporters had put together a new and powerful political machine of their own. In 2000 he, Maria Elena Durazo, and SEIU Vice-President Eliseo Medina established the Organization of Los Angeles Workers to coordinate future political campaigns. “Supporting a candidate is no longer about bringing them to our banquet so that they can take a grip-and-grin photograph for our newspaper,” Contreras told an interviewer. “It is about what you, the candidate, are going to do to level the playing field of organizing for the workers”53. Henceforth union-supported candidates were not supposed just to vote for specific bills in Sacramento or support pro labor measures in the LA city council. They were expected to attend union demonstrations and even participate in acts of civil disobedience. “We expect them to be on the line. In the [2000] janitors’ strike we had six or seven of them – city council members, state legislators – being arrested with us to show the plight of the janitors”54.

Building an effective Labor-Latino political alliance also required negotiating the thorny terrain of black-brown relations. Until 1990, LA’s African American community had effectively had two city council seats at its disposal, and its influence in the Bus Drivers’ Union, the city employees’ union, and other organizations meant that it was still a major player in the LACFL. But the ongoing demographic shift towards a Latino majority, and the anger which had been generated by the transfer of traditional African American jobs to non-union Mexican immigrants, caused deep black-brown tensions over housing, jobs, and politics to surface in the neighborhoods, the schools, and the streets. In the 2001 mayoral election, for example, most African American voters supported James Hahn Jr., son of legendary county supervisor Kenneth Hahn who had built up a major political base in the African American community, not the LACFL’s preferred candidate, former union activist Antonio Villaraigosa. This racial division threatened to halt the progress of the Labor-Latino alliance55.
The Contreras regime recognized this danger. Although it never succeeded in dispelling black fears entirely, in 2003 it helped to allay them by uniting behind the successful candidacy of African American union leader Martin Ludlow – former political director of the LACFL – in the mixed, black-Latino, Tenth Councilmanic District. Ludlow had established good credentials with the Latino community by working for SEIU and by acting as political director in Villaraigosa’s 2001 mayoral campaign. The following year Latino politicians increased their level of black support by helping to elect another African American, Karen Bass, in the 47th Assembly District, even though a recent reapportionment had transformed her once majority black district into a marginal Anglo constituency.

The Labor-Latino political alliance also extended its influence beyond Los Angeles by helping to elect a growing number of union leaders to the state legislature in Sacramento, thereby shifting the entire center of political gravity of California to the left. In 1998 it played a major role in electing former Assembly Speaker Cruz Bustamente as lieutenant governor, and in that same year it deployed hundreds of staffers in cities up and down the state to help defeat the anti-union proposal, Proposition 226. If this proposition had passed it would have prevented unions from spending money on political campaigns without securing the written permission of their members. The very fact that Proposition 226 was put on the ballot by conservatives hostile to organized labor testified to their fears about labor’s growing political clout.

In May, 2005, the Labor-Latino political alliance completed its ascent by electing Antonio Villaraigosa to the mayor’s office by a vote of 58% to 41% of the vote for his opponent James K. Hahn – a larger margin than the one secured by Tom Bradley in 1973. By this date the new alliance had elected four union members to the fifteen-member City Council. By cajoling others Council members, they could often out together an outright majority. More than thirty
additional pro-union municipal and state leaders had also been elected to office. In 2005 Villaraigosa carried all of LA’s old, downtown working class neighborhoods, but he also expanded his victory further west to secure majorities all but two of the city’s fifteen councilmanic districts. The new mayor won 84% of the Latino vote and 60% of the union vote, and he also increased his share of the black vote, which had only been twenty per cent in 2001, to 58% in 2005.58.

7. INTERNAL UNION CONFLICTS THREATEN FURTHER PROGRESS.

Antonio Villagairosa’s election as city mayor in 2005 may have represented the high point of the LA’s labor movement’s rise to prominence. Since then, a number of other advances have been made. In 2006 SEIU enrolled 4,000 black security guards into a new local called Security Officers United (SOUla)59. The last few years have also seen the establishment of several new, community workers’ alliances (informal associations of low wage employees) such as the Korean Workers Alliance and the Pilipino Workers Center. As recently as October 1910 Attorney General Jerry Brown sued several large car wash companies for $6.6 million in unpaid back wages on behalf of the Los Angeles Car Wash Campaign — a move which reflected California labor’s increased political clout60.

Behind the scenes, however, internal union disputes were brewing which threatened to call a halt to labor’s further progress, at both the national and the local level. The remainder of this paper addresses the two additional questions posed at the outset: is LA’s labor’s recent revival likely to establish a long-term upward trend? Or is it more accurate to characterize it as a ‘false dawn’ which has passed its peak and is now receding behind the clouds? For greater ease in understanding these disputes and the threat they pose to the labor recovery in Southern California, they are discussed under three subheads:-
A/ Ideological Divisions Within SEIU.

As noted earlier, the basis for the initial success of LA’s ‘new unionism’ in the 1990s were the mass demonstrations which poorly-paid immigrant workers carried out in the service trades. Without a coherent union philosophy, however, the energy generated by such protest demonstrations is easily dissipated. The key to the organizational success which followed is to be found in the list of internal union reforms initiated by the Service Employees International Union and copied by other public employee unions and the service trades. Besides the ones already cited, these reforms included increased spending on organizing new members, cuts in union bureaucracy, and the amalgamation of small union locals into larger ones in order to bargain successfully with giant, nation-wide corporations. “We call for a … massive refocusing of unions on growth”, SEIU President Stern declared, “reorganizing unions so that workers who have strength can share it with others who do the same jobs”61.

Given the rapid consolidation of ownership in California’s hospital, supermarket, and hotel industries, SEIU’s rationale for combining its smaller locals into large, state-wide bargaining units made a good deal of sense. The problem was that most of these reforms were imposed from above by the SEIU’s international leadership, without proper consultation of rank-and-file opinion at the local union level62.

In addition, consolidating small locals unions into giant locals with 50,000 members or more involved the breakup of many existing, multi-occupational locals and the dismissal of numerous, locally elected officials. These changes may have made bargaining sense. But they clashed with rank-and-file demands for local autonomy, and with traditions of union democracy. In January 2006, for example, SEIU’s Washington headquarters combined the 55,000 members of Local 399 in Los Angeles County with six other California locals to create the largest health
The merger was voted up in 2007, creating United Health Care West, which with 150,000 members became the biggest health care local in the nation.63

United Health Care West was bureaucratic, unwieldy, and unpopular from the start. Rank-and-file members of the union, in LA and in San Francisco, argued that it would “threaten their democratic rights, diminish the quality of local representation, and make it difficult to hold leadership accountable”64. In Los Angeles, rank-and-file health care workers were even more upset when SEIU official Annelle Grajeda was appointed, not elected, to run the giant local and fifty long-time staffers were dismissed. In addition, United Health Care West was governed from Oakland, not Los Angeles. The idea was to free up staff members from representation duties so they could concentrate on organizing new members. But Catherine Lefkowitz, a registered nurse at Kaiser Sunset, was only one of many critics who complained that the giant local’s officers had lost touch with their members and ignored the need for union democracy. Since the merger, they complained, Annelle Grajeda had gone “from being our employee to our boss, and she reports only to [ SEIU President ] Andy Stern, not the members”65.

Another controversial element in SEIU’s reform philosophy was its abandonment of the AFL-CIO’s traditional policy of adversarial unionism, which acknowledged inherent differences of interest between workers and employers, in favor of what Andy Stern called “value-added unionism”66. By this he meant that, in the current climate of anti-union opinion, unions would be more likely to succeed if they proposed contracts to the employers which, in return for improved pay and conditions, offered clauses that would also bring economic advantages advantageous to the employers as well, such as improvements in productivity or an agreement not to challenge the workplace prerogatives of management. In the last ten years SEIU has secured numerous contracts in its various divisions throughout in the U.S. which reflect this
philosophy. But in California, as elsewhere, they have provoked opposition among rank-and-file unionists who considered them to be class collaborationist.

For example, in 2006 widespread indignation was expressed by LA’s health care workers when SEIU negotiated an agreement with the California Nursing Home Association which outlawed strikes, permitted owners to choose which nursing homes could be unionized, and agreed not to damage the Association’s profitability. In exchange for wage and benefit concessions, the agreement even suggested that normally pro-union Democrats in the state legislature vote against a bill that would have allowed patients to sue their HMO’s for inadequate care. Stern saw this agreement as an example of approaching the employers in a spirit of cooperation. His opponents viewed it, far more critically, as an example of class collaborationism, or even of company unionism. Rose Ann Demoro, executive director of the California Nurses Association, expressed the anger of the rank and file at a press conference: “You can’t be on the side of the public and on the side of the corporation at the same time.”

In May 2006, when Stern’s critics in United Health Care Workers West refused to back down over the amalgamation issue and the question of “value added unionism”, he placed the local under trusteeship. Within days, many of its members left and established the rival National Union of Health Care Workers, led by Stern’s former collaborator Sal Rosselli, with whom SEIU’s international leadership has battled for the loyalty of California’s health care workers ever since.

B/ Split Between AFL-CIO and Change to Win and Its Consequences

These quarrels inside California’s service unions were compounded by the nation-wide split that occurred between the leaders of traditional trade unionism inside the AFL-CIO and the
insurgents in SEIU and their allies in four other major, reform-oriented unions: the Teamsters, Grocery Workers, Carpenters, Laborers, and United Farm Workers.

During the 1990s and early 2000s reformers in the national labor movement, led by SEIU President Andy Stern and a number of other, college-educated leaders such as John Wilhelm of HERE, pointed to the parlous state of the AFL-CIO, whose numbers had fallen from 35% of the U.S. labor force in 1955 to 14%, and urged President Sweeney to recognize that unless immediate and sweeping reforms were undertaken, the federation would lose all of its remaining bargaining power. The reforms they advocated derived from the same set of ideas which SEIU had adopted inside its own, nation-wide jurisdiction. They included the need to (i) Compel small unions with overlapping jurisdictions to consolidate into a much smaller number of occupationally distinct unions blocs with greater bargaining power, along the lines of SEIU itself; (ii) Commit $50 million to new organizing campaigns to stop numerical decline; (iii) Reassess labor’s support for the Democratic party. (The last of these three proposals was later abandoned.)

These proposals were vigorously debated at the AFL-CIO convention in 2005. President Sweeney and a number of other delegates expressed general support for them, but argued that they went too far, too fast. “Any attempt to dictate the merger of unions”, stated one delegate, “would from the start be doomed to fail.” Other delegates pointed out that the AFL-CIO had come into being as a federation of independent unions and that attempts at coercion would undermine the sovereignty of many valuable – if small - craft unions. Still others argued that the AFL-CIO could not afford to devote such a large proportion of its income to new organizing campaigns without compromising its other activities. Acting on a threat which several of them had made public before the 2005 convention took place, the four above-named unions, joined
later by three others, seceded from the AFL-CIO after the convention was over and established Change to Win as a rival organization.

Predictably, the results of this split in Southern California, as elsewhere in the U.S., have damaged the labor movement. In theory it placed the affiliates of all seven of Change To Win’s national unions (including SEIU, Teamsters, Carpenters etc.) outside the bounds of the AFL-CIO, divided the national labor movement at a moment of critical weakness, and opened up unions in both federations to the risk of its members being raided by unions from the other. It raised problems such as the duplication of effort, and compromised labor’s relations with the state and federal governments. In Los Angeles, where secessionist locals joining Change to Win made up about 40% of the LAFED’s membership, Miguel Contreras tried to prevent conflict from developing between the two groups by developing an understanding with local Change to Win’s leaders before the split actually occurred. But his efforts were vetoed by President Sweeney.

The result in the years since 2005 has been inter-union conflict, the diversion of valuable time and resources from new organizing campaigns, and exploitation by employers of divisions between the two union federations in negotiating new union agreements. In Los Angeles, perhaps the most serious of these conflicts was the dispute which erupted in 2009 between the two halves of UNITE-HERE. (UNITE consisted of garment workers locals which had formerly belonged to the AFL-CIO’s Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the ILGWU; HERE was the Hotel and Restaurant Workers, which belonged to Change to Win. The two sides quarreled when UNITE’s garment worker leaders disagreed with HERE’s hotel organizers over organizing tactics.

For grassroots activists in Southern California this quarrel was an especially bitter blow.
The successes of HERE Local 11 in the hotel industry, the victories won by Justice for Janitors, and the aid of former ILGWU members in developing the core ideas of social justice unionism had given them some of their proudest moments. But here were the leaders of all three of these unions, who had united behind the 1990s upsurge, engaged in internecine conflict. “For people who believe in the American labor movement”, wrote one observer, “and who’ve seen the positive changes that these unions have made in the lives of their members, watching this battle unfold is like watching two good friends caught up in a vicious divorce”77.

C/ CHANGE TO WIN FAILS TO SPARK A UNION RENNAISSANCE.

Some observers, while recognizing that the split between the AFL-CIO and Change to Win has been unfortunate, have comforted themselves by drawing an analogy between the rapid expansion of the national labor movement that took place when United Mine Workers president John L. Lewis left the old AFL and founded the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1936-37. Then, too, organized labor had just emerged from a period of significant decline. Then, too, an older generation of AFL leaders had failed to recognize the need to organize a new generation of unskilled, immigrant workers into broadly-based, up-to-date industrial unions. With the economic revolution that accompanied the demise of heavy industry in the 1980s, the argument runs, a new generation of low-paid Mexican, Central American, and Asian immigrants has entered U.S. industry who also work at a new set of tasks and who bear many similarities to the thousands of Italians, Slavs, and Poles who supported the CIO in the 1930s. “Such an optimistic scenario”, writes one labor scholar, “would be a reprise of the CIO era, when a burgeoning labor movement served as the vehicle for second-generation immigrants to move up economically into the mainstream of American culture”78.

The motives which prompted Lewis and his supporters to quit the AFL in 1936-37 were
quite similar to those which propelled CTW to leave the AFL-CIO in 2005. They were to stop union decline, organize new generations of hitherto neglected semi-skilled and unskilled workers, and spread a new, more disciplined form of ‘general unionism’ which could bargain on equal terms with today’s multinational corporations in the same way that the UAW and the Steel Workers bargained with U.S. Steel and General Motors in an earlier age. The result in the 1930s and 1940s was a period of creative rivalry between the old AFL and the old CIO which resulted in a period of unprecedented union expansion which, by 1955 when the two federations re-united, had brought the U.S. labor movement up to its peak membership of 22 million members, representing 35% of the American labor force79.

Unfortunately, however, many of the elements in this historical analogy are misleading. It is true that some of the new organizing policies introduced by SEIU and other ‘new unions’ have been copied effectively in other cities with numerous service workers, in somewhat the same way that the organizing policies laid down by the old CIO also spread across the country. Miami, Florida provides a good example of this80. But with the exception of SEIU, which is continuing to grow, Change to Win’s organizing record in the first five year of its existence has been dismal. Public employee unions continue to grow, as well as some new elements within the service workers’ unions, such as the Hotel Workers in Las Vegas81. But the creative tension between the AFL and the CIO that was sparked by the founding of the CIO in 1936-37 - and which led to the dramatic growth of both organizations in the 1930s and 1940s – has signally failed to emerge from the current split. To the contrary, the most recent report of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the overall number of workers organized into unions fell from 12.3% of the workforce in 2009 to 11.9% in 2010.82.

The reasons for this inappropriateness of this historical analogy are not difficult to
identify. First organized labor’s prospects, both politically and economically, are far worse today than they were in the period of the New Deal. Then, unions were favorably regarded, legislation facilitating labor organization was being passed by Congress, and the links between labor and the Democratic party were far more fruitful than they are today83. Second, employers in the 1930s, weakened by the Great Depression, were on the defensive. Today, the opposite is true. From the time of the Air Traffic Controllers strike under President Reagan in 1991 up to the present, employers have fought unions with all the weapons at their command – including some new ones, like the use of professional union busters. For fifty years the AFL-CIO has sought the repeal of the anti-union Taft Hartley Act (1947) - which first put a check on union growth in the postwar period - without avail, even when the Democrats have been in control of Congress. Today, with a far high proportion of neutral or even pro business Democrats in Congress than were present in the days of the New Deal, the Employees Freedom of Choice Act (which would make it easier for workers to join a union) is also beyond their reach84.

Thirdly, unlike the old CIO, Change To Win has never become a full-service union federation with the ability to organize workers on its own. It is simply an ad hoc alliance of six or seven sovereign unions with similar aims, the most important of which is to increase the amount of money spent on union organizing. In 1936 the CIO installed its own headquarters staff, and President Lewis hired hundreds of new organizers to plan the unionization of auto workers in Detroit, steelworkers in Ohio and Pennsylvania, and textile workers in the Carolinas. Change to Win has not attempted to do anything remotely like this today85.

The most damaging evidence of the inability of the LA brand of ‘new unionism’ to bring about a sustained recovery on the part of the Southern California labor movement – let alone export its organizing techniques successfully across the country – concerns its failure to spread
its ‘new unionist’ message beyond the boundaries of service unions such as SEIU into established unions (some of them, like the Teamsters, coming out of the old AFL and others, like the UAW, originating in the CIO) which continue to dominate the LA County Federation of Labor. The same thing is true of Change to Win’s efforts in the country as a whole. By 1990 South Central Los Angeles, sometimes known as the Alameda corridor, had lost virtually all of its auto, steel and rubber plants. These industries have been replaced by a mixture of new transportation and light manufacturing plants such as storage facilities, tortilla manufacturers and other food producers, garment factories, trucking, electrical, small metal, and harbor-related suppliers, which employ a mixture of Mexican, Black, Pilipino, and other immigrant workers. Boasting 636,700 jobs, the Alameda corridor, located on both sides of the underground rail connection which connects downtown to Long Beach harbor, now contains the largest manufacturing zone in the United States.

But over the last twenty years only one serious attempt has been made to organize these new manufacturing workers, even though most of them are Latinos, African Americans, or Pilipinos with an ethno-cultural background similar to that of the downtown, service workers. This attempt, known as the Los Angeles Manufacturing Project (LAMAP), was made in 1996 by a group of progressive labor organizers led by Peter Olney. Nine unions, including the Teamsters, the UAW, the International Longshoremen’s Union and several other industrial unions from the old CIO, agreed to establish an Independent Organizing Committee which would contribute $250,000 to a fund that would be used to carry out a major, new organizing campaign in the manufacturing zone. But the plan came to grief over the same problems of union insularity, jurisdictional infighting, and unwillingness to risk sufficient sums of money on new organizing projects which President Andy of SEIU and other reformers identified as the key
weaknesses of the U.S. labor movement as a whole.

One by one eight of the nine contributing unions went back on their financial commitments, stating that $250,000 was too much to spend on a plan that would only benefit a few of their local unions in Southeast LA. In the end only the Teamsters stood by LAMAP, and in January 1998 it too withdrew after the other unions had pulled out, causing the campaign to collapse. Significantly, several of the established CIO unions in this failed coalition were led by white, male leaders who did not incorporate women into their senior leadership, or recognize the need to develop the kind of community-based organizing tools which animated the immigrant janitors, hotel, and restaurant workers in their downtown service workers’ campaign.

7. CONCLUSION.

Barring unforeseen developments, it seems likely that the Southern California union renaissance which began twenty years ago among Mexican service workers downtown and on the West Side of Los Angeles has now stalled. Politically, the Labor-Latino electoral alliance still retains much of its power, both in LA and in Sacramento. But the hope that the Justice for Janitors campaign of 1990 would generate widespread union growth throughout Southern California, or even spark labor revival throughout the nation, now seems over optimistic.

As we have seen, the prospects for such a revival have been undermined by a variety of factors: policy differences between reformers and traditionalists which led to the split between Change to Win and the AFL-CIO, the downturn in the economy, the failure of the new organizing techniques pioneered by SEIU to be passed on to unions in the high tech and manufacturing sectors of the economy, the intransigence of the National Labor Relations Board, and the ongoing climate of public indifference and political hostility.

Nor is this all. As a result of recent the recession and the need for drastic cuts in
municipal and state budgets, a growing public backlash has developed among the public in California and elsewhere against the guaranteed pensions and promises of secure employment which the public employee unions, as a result of their great bargaining strength, have been able to secure. Until recently the LA County Fed, while rejecting Mayor Villaraigosa’s criticisms of the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) for its opposition to school reform, have maintained their overall support for the mayor, thereby keeping the Labor-Latino political alliance more or less intact. “We look at [the situation] issue by issue”, County Fed President Maria Elena Durazo recently told the Los Angeles Times when interviewed about the current debate over tenure for school teachers. She disagreed with Villagoisora for singling out the Teachers Union for criticism. “But its not an across-the-board attacking or demonizing” of organized labor89.

But the LACFL’s room for political maneuver may also be narrowing. In recent months nation-wide protests have escalated not only among Republicans, but also among labor’s Democratic allies, against the legislation which sanctions generous pension plans not only for teachers but also for civil servants, firemen, police, health workers and other city and state employees which far outstrip the capacity of the public treasury to repay them. In 2009, normally pro labor Mayor Villaraigosa even came out in favor of firing a number of city employees as a means of balancing the city budget - although the exact number to be cut is still being debated - which again brought him into conflict with the unions90. Other signs of labor’s diminishing political clout may also be in the works. In 2003, for example, former LAPD Police Chief Bernard C. Parks, a fiscal conservative who advocates cutting 4,000 city jobs to deal with the budget shortfall, was elected to the City Council from the Eighth Councilmanic District downtown – a traditional labor stronghold. He has kept the same seat ever since91.
Immigrant anger at outbursts of white nativism, which prompted thousands of Southern California’s Mexican workers to become U.S. citizens, played a large role in persuading many of them to join the unions of their trade. That anger is still present, thanks to the recent passage of anti-immigrant legislation in Arizona. So, too, is indignation over high unemployment and the prolonged economic downturn, although the recession has so far signally failed to produce the kind of worker demonstrations we saw in the 1930s. Perhaps the spirit of grassroots militancy, which did so much to prompt the ‘new unionist’ upsurge, will survive the present crisis, belie this paper’s title as a ‘false dawn’ for union labor, and lead to a resumption of union growth in the years to come.

But I doubt it. It seems more likely that the increase in union density we have seen in Los Angeles in recent years represents the delayed maturation of a city-wide labor movement which for much of its history was repressed by the open shop, by the late arrival of modern industry, and by numerous other vicissitudes. For major union growth to continue in one city to the exclusion of others would be to fly in the face of all of what we know about the current decline of organized labor not only in America, but in the western world as a whole.
NOTES


13. So far no historian has attempted to delineate a generational, or ‘stage’ theory regarding the development of the identity of Mexican Americans which goes beyond Sanchez’s conclusions. See George Sanchez, Becoming Mexican American, Ethnicity, Culture and Identity In Chicano Los Angeles (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993), passim.


17. Although the arrival of the CIO in Southern California in 1936-37 sparked numerous strikes and demonstrations, they were significantly smaller and milder in their effect than the ones which occurred in the industrial cities of the American Midwest. See Becky Nicolaides, My Blue Heaven, Life and Politics In The Working Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 248-255; Robert H. Zieger, The CIO, 1935-1955 (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1995), Chaps. 3-6.


2001 ), 89.

25. Ibid, 224.


27. Ibid, 183-204.

28. The Living Wage Agreement negotiated in 1997 for LA city employees was $7.25 an hour, plus family health benefits, or $8 an hour without the benefits. This was still insufficient for a single mother with two children to live on unless she had some other source of income. See David Reynolds, “Living Wage Campaigns As Social Movements: Experiences From Nine Cities” Labor Studies Journal, vol. 26, no. 2 ( Summer, 2001 ), 36.


30. Quoted in ibid, 191.

31. Ruth Milkman and Daisy Rooks, California Union Membership: A Turn Of The Century Portrait ( Los Angeles, IRLE ), 38.

32. Ibid, 32-33.


35. Quoted in Milkman, LA Story, 163.


37. Quoted in Voice of Local 399 , vol. 17, no. 4 ( October/November1993 ), p. 3 ( SEIU Collection, Walter Reuther Library, Detroit ), Box 382.


42. For a general introduction to the rise of the Labor-Latino political alliance in Southern California, see Burt, The Search For A Civic Voice, passim.


44. Quoted in ibid, 166. See also Myrna Oliver, “Bill Robertson, Labor Leader and Power Broker”, Los Angeles Times (December 10, 2005), B, p.4.


47. For the political role of the Community Services Organization in Los Angeles politics in the 1940s and 1950, see Burt, The Search For A Civic Voice, Chap 5.

48. Ibid, 331.


51. Ibid, 55-56.

52. Quoted in ibid, 57.

53. Loc. cit.


55. Loc. cit.

56. Loc cit.


59. Labor Education News, IRLE publication (Summer/Fall 2010), 5.


61. Schiavone, Unions In Crisis?, 50-51.


66. Ibid, passim. See also Stern, A Country That Works, Chaps. 3-4.


69. In October 2010, after a bitterly fought election campaign, United Health Care Workers West defeated the National Union of Health Care Workers in a union representation election at the California Kaiser hospital chain, an election which the Los Angeles Times described as “dishearten[ing]”, because it “diverted money and foot soldiers from efforts to organize non-union workers” See Los Angeles Times (October 8, 2010), p. AA3.

70. Schiavone, Unions In Crisis?, 49-53.


73. Schiavone, Unions In Crisis?, 51.


75. Harold Meyerson, “Disunite There: Civil War At UNITE-HERE, One of America’s Stellar Unions”, American Prospect (February 27, 2009), 8-9.

76. Quoted in ibid, 9.

77. Quoted in Milkman, LA Story, 162.

78. Zieger, The CIO, Chaps. 3-4, 7, 13.

79. As the largest and most influential union in Change To Win, SEIU implemented its new organizing techniques all over the country. In Florida, for example, which possesses many immigrant service workers and whose tourist industry strongly the leisure industry in Southern California, the Florida Health Care Union recently combined two health care locals into one. This resulted in a 20,000 strong union which included both nursing home and hospital employees that followed many of the same policies as SEIU did in California. See Melanie Shell-Weiss, Coming To Miami, A Social History (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 2009), 225-232; and “Monica Russo, President SEIU Healthcare Union”, seiufhu.localsonline.org.


84. Zieger, The CIO, Chap. 3.


86. Ibid, 235-236; Tom Gallacher, “Everybody Loved It, But …” Z Magazine (Fall, 1998),
21-28.


89. Loc. cit. See also LAT (December 12, 2010), p. A, 8.
