

UC Berkeley

The State of California Labor, 2001

Title

Labor and Community Collaboration

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4ss9w56t>

Author

Vargas, Marcos

Publication Date

2001-09-01

CHAPTER 16

LABOR AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

MARCOS VARGAS

Despite the current resurgence in union organizing activity in states such as California, continued expansion of the new economy has failed to lift a large sector of the state's labor force out of poverty. In light of this form of persistent inequalities, there has become a growing need to undertake new strategies to strengthen workers' collective voice. The overall decline in union membership nationwide during the last thirty years has also raised concerns over the capacity of organized labor alone to effectively address much needed wage, health and safety issues affecting many workers and their families. Moreover, many unions do not have the staff to effectively reach the growing number of immigrant low-wage workers. This is not to say that this new workforce cannot be organized. Over the last decade, some unions have successfully undertaken collaborative broad-based organizing efforts, such as Los Angeles' highly successful Justice for Janitors campaign, mobilizations to pass local living wage ordinances, and organized mass protests against global free trade policies. These trends reflect a growing realization of the strategic need to strengthen the collective voice of workers and their families through collaborative advocacy and organizing efforts that bring together organized labor and other sectors of civil society.

One sector which has emerged as a potentially important new partner in the efforts to give greater voice to the collective voice of workers is the state's community-based organizations (CBOs). In response to pressing issues of common concern to labor unions and CBOs, there has been a marked increase in collaboration between these two groups in the form of coalitions around unionization, community organizing and legislative advocacy. A survey of California unions and CBOs, from which this article draws much of its data, indicates that such collaborative efforts have become an integral part of efforts by unions to address issues affecting workers and their families. Such collaborative efforts include community-based organizing, political empowerment, policy planning, legislative advocacy, community unionization efforts, worker centers and social movements.

Furthermore, the growing influence of ethnic and multi ethnic CBOs in California has also provided opportunities for greater cooperation among organized labor and those organizations whose mission it is to serve immigrant communities. As California's Latino and Asian immigrant communities continue to grow in their economic and political importance, ethnic and multi ethnic CBOs, as well as CBOs engaged in social movements for social, economic and environmental justice, continue to exert political and economic influence. For example, grassroots efforts by Latino CBOs to effectively tap into the backlash against the 1994 passage of the anti-immigrant initiative Proposition 187 resulted in an increase in naturalization applications from approximately 250,000 in 1990 to an estimated 1.3 million in 1996. By 1998 this translated into a jump in Latino voter participation from 8 percent in 1994 to 13 percent in 1998, contributing significantly to the election of Governor Gray Davis and Lieutenant

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements to the following for their contributions to this paper: Dr. Paul Ong, Director of the UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations and Co-Principle Investigator of the Future of Work and Health Research Project; June McMahon, Co-Principle Investigator; and Research Assistants, Rena Wong, Andrea Tinsley, and Andrew Graham; the Wellness Foundation; the Ventura County Living Wage Coalition; Robin Jacobs for her assistance in editing and all the union and California representatives for their participation in the research surveys and interviews .

Governor Cruz Bustamante (Vargas 1999). Other CBOs with ethnic and multi ethnic constituencies have been instrumental in affecting local policy, such as living wage coalitions headed by such organizations as Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, San Jose's Working Partnership USA, and San Diego's Center for Policy Initiatives.

Efforts to pass city and county living wage ordinances through grassroots labor and community organizing campaigns represent one important new organizing and legislative strategy for raising the wage and health benefits standards of low-wage workers. A closer study of this strategy further indicates their potential for promoting greater long-term cooperation between organized labor and CBOs and the building of effective broad based coalitions for worker's rights. Such coalition-based organizing strategies therefore serve as models for strengthening the collective voice of workers and their families, as they expand their communities' capacity to support unionization and other pro-labor/community development activities.

This chapter attempts to better understand the growing role of contemporary labor/community collaborative efforts as strategies for strengthening the collective voice of California's workers and their families. The context for this investigation is a dramatically changing economy and labor market, coupled with marked changes in California's labor movement and the growing influence of ethnic and multi ethnic CBOs. The chapter draws significantly from data derived from a 1999/2000, five county UCLA study of California union and CBO participation in efforts to impact health and safety issues affecting workers and their families. The UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations study, which included a survey of 214 unions and CBOs from the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Alameda, Fresno and Ventura, also served to illuminate the emergence of new forms of labor/community alliances.

As a form of case study, the chapter also focuses on a living wage campaign currently underway in Ventura County, California, involving a broad-based progressive coalition of community, labor and faith-based organizations. Having successfully mobilized grassroots support for living wage ordinances in the County of Ventura and City of Oxnard, the Ventura County Living Wage Coalition has included a regional initiative to improve health coverage for low-wage working families, and the establishment of a regional popular research and educational center for the study of sustainable economics as part of their effort to pass local living wage ordinances. As a model of labor/community collaboration, living wage campaigns, such as Ventura County's, provide useful information for building the overall capacity of these progressive organizations and strengthening the collective voice of workers.

Historical Context for Labor/Community Collaboration

While contemporary forms of labor/community collaboration are unique to current socioeconomic conditions facing working families, cooperation between organized labor and CBOs in California is not new. One prominent example is the Alinsky style organizing work of the Community Service Organization (CSO) in the early 1950s. Led by Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) organizer Fred Ross, the CSO engaged in a methodology centered on organizing workers through community-based efforts and the provision of services to workers and their families (Reitz and Reitz 1987; Tjerandsen 1980; Vargas 1999). The CSO, which itself was established from a collaboration between Mexican American Steelworkers and several Mexican-American community-based associations, grew into a significant political force in Los Angeles, registering and mobilizing thousands of new voters, while addressing such issues as housing discrimination, school segregation and police brutality (Acuña 1988). The success of the CSO's grassroots organizing efforts eventually contributed to the establishment of the United Farm Workers under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, continuing its methodology of organizing grassroots community support for farm worker unionization efforts. This organizing model and other forms of labor/community collaboration continue today in organizing efforts targeting immigrants and other low-wage workers.

The current growth in labor/CBO collaboration has challenged some of the historical distrust between labor and low-income community organizations rooted in the 1960s and 70s. The basis of this distrust comes in large part from the participation of labor unions in business-led "growth coalitions" that encouraged private development and supplied union construction jobs to the building and construction

trade unions. These efforts prospered at the expense of working class communities, as communities of color were displaced by urban renewal, and often excluded from union jobs. While they protected current members in the building trades, these efforts pitted unions against poor communities of color (Zabin and Martin 1999; Mollenkopf 1983).

Economic and political changes beginning in the mid-1970s have contributed significantly to the conditions of new non-traditional alliances between labor and community in the 1990s. These changes included the rise in global competition, capital flight, and the nation's shift from a manufacturing to service economy, as well as a growing corporate anti-union offensive and a decade of Reagan/Bush anti-union and corporate deregulation policies. While experiencing a gradual decline since its 37 percent peak in 1946, labor membership has declined dramatically in the last two decades, dropping from 21 percent in 1980 to below 15 percent in 1995. Today, with only 11 percent of the private-sector labor force organized, it would take more than 300,000 new members recruited each year to keep up with the growth in the labor force, and millions more to reach the nation's 1946 peak (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998).

With labor's renewed commitment to organizing in the mid-1990s, California has seen a dramatic rise in organizing campaigns focusing on the state's growing immigrant labor force. Due to the rank and file movement, which brought dramatic changes in union leadership, including the 1995 sweeping election of former Service Employee International Union (SEIU) president John Sweeney to the top leadership of the AFL-CIO, organized labor has dedicated resources to organizing at a level not seen since the early industrial unionism of the 1940s. These developments reflect a strategic effort to reverse the decline in union membership, stagnation in organizing efforts, and steadily shrinking bargaining and political power (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998). California's low-wage service sector workforce has been the focus of much of the state's unionization efforts. Demographic change in California, associated in large part with increased immigration from Mexico, Central America and Asia through the 1980s and 90s, has resulted in Latino, and Asian immigrants dominating this burgeoning state-wide low-wage labor force.

The increase in immigration has also resulted in significant growth and political influence by ethnic and multi ethnic CBOs serving immigrant populations throughout California, thereby setting the groundwork for future labor/community collaborative efforts to organize immigrant workers. Latino CBOs throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s were at the forefront in serving immigrant families, providing important social services and undertaking community development programs, while also challenging anti-immigrant politics and other forms of institutional racism, sometimes even within organized labor (Vargas 1999; Garcia 1994). Community-based organizations, such as One Stop Immigration, Coalition for Human Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA), Hermandad Mexicana, El Concilio del Condado de Ventura, as well as numerous others immigrant rights and service organizations (IRSOs) throughout California, were advocating for the rights of immigrants, while also building political strength through naturalization campaigns, citizenship classes, voter registration and voter education campaigns (Vargas 1999).

By the early 1990s community-based immigrant worker organizations, such as California Immigrant Workers Association (CIWA), were also organizing Mexican and Central American workers, including day laborers and housing construction drywallers. Such efforts to organize immigrant workers, many of whom were undocumented, while supported by many rank and file union members, generally found little support from union leadership. However, in a few years, pragmatic realization of the potential of such immigrant organizing in raising union membership and the commitment of a number of labor activists and organizers resulted in the establishment of the Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project (LAMAP), a multi-union, area-wide drive to organize immigrants working in Los Angeles' largest manufacturing district, the Alameda corridor. While now defunct, LAMAP showed the integral importance of expanding workplace organizing to the community (Bacon 1996).

Many of the contemporary forms of labor/community collaboration are associated with a new generation of social movements for economic and environmental justice, which emerged throughout the 1990s. Expanding beyond the workplace and the concerns of collective bargaining, these new forms of labor/community collaborations have addressed unionization, environmental protection, immigrant rights, and living wage standards for non-union low-wage workers, and the provision of employer based health

coverage. While it is still too early to determine the long-term effectiveness of many of these collaborative efforts, several are already proving successful in supporting unionization of low-wage workers, impacting local policy, and building the foundation for the sustainability of broad-based coalitions for economic justice.

Emergence of Contemporary Labor/Community Collaboration

Recognizing the need to strengthen their capacity to address the economic effects of the new economy on working families and communities of color, organized labor and CBOs have sought to establish new collaborative alliances. Since the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s, California has seen an emergence in coalitions between organized labor and CBOs, including faith, student, and ethnic/multi ethnic based organizations. A response to the devastating nationwide impact of capital flight and de-industrialization on inner cities since the mid-1970s, unions and CBOs established new alliances in support of union organizing efforts and for greater accountability in economic development policy (Conrad 1997; Zabin and Martin 1999). With their roots nationally in defensive efforts to confront plant closures in the manufacturing industries in the 1980s (Nissen 1995), new labor/community collaborative efforts have sought to address a wider range of economic issues, including job access and better training and higher wages for low-wage workers in the growing service sector (Zabin and Martin 1999). As these alliances are formed, they are contributing to a better understanding of how labor/community collaboration can strengthen the voice of workers and their families.

Recognition by unions and CBOs of the importance of such collaborative efforts has been substantiated in the findings of a current 1999/2000 study of California unions and CBOs conducted by the UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations (IIR). The study, of which this author served as the project coordinator, included separate surveys of union and CBOs based in the five counties of Los Angeles, Alameda, Fresno, Ventura and Orange, as well as eight individual case studies.¹ Entitled "The Role of Labor in the Future of Work and Health," the study's primary focus has been the investigation of strategies undertaken by California unions and CBOs, both individually and collectively, to impact the health of workers and their families. Targeting the heads of local unions and the executive directors of CBOs as the study's primary respondents, the surveys gathered information on issues of worker health and safety, while also generating data on the level and type of union and CBO participation in labor/community collaborations, including involvement in social movement coalitions, and their reasons for participation. The case studies, which have investigated union/CBO strategies to address health issues affecting workers, included several cases in which unions and CBOs have participated in broader efforts to strengthen the collective voice of workers. Case studies also included union and CBO participation in campaigns to pass local living wage ordinances, efforts to impact welfare to work policy, environmental justice mobilizations, and union and management partnerships.

From the perspective of union leadership, CBOs are becoming an increasingly important ally in efforts of unionization, public policy advocacy, and political empowerment. Of the unions surveyed, over three-quarters acknowledged working cooperatively with CBOs in organizing efforts. While solidarity-based collaboration between different unions and locals is not uncommon within organized labor, collaboration with groups outside the labor movement remains less common. As discussed earlier, declining membership, a shift in priority toward organizing low-wage workers and the growing influence of the state's immigrant communities, have contributed to greater collaboration between organized labor and CBOs. The forms of collaboration, while varying, also reflect this context. Table 1 indicates the type of collaboration.

Table 1 Union Collaborative Involvement with CBOs

Cooperative Involvement	No.	%
Electoral/voter participation	67	59
Organizing support for unionization	62	54
Policy Advocacy/lobbying	41	36
Community-based organizing	33	29
Policy Research	15	13
Direct social services	1	1

Numbers and percentages derived from the 88 unions that are currently working cooperatively with community-based organizations.

Efforts to impact public policy, including policy advocacy, research, lobbying and electoral politics, make up the greatest point of intersection between these two sectors. While 36 percent identified the area of policy advocacy and lobbying as their collaborative work with CBOs and 13 percent the area of policy research, electoral politics is by far the most significant form of public policy collaboration on which unions are working with CBOs. Of those unions engaged in collaborative working relations with CBOs, 58 percent were involved in electoral/voter participation efforts. While this is not surprising, given organized labor's historical involvement in electoral politics as a public policy strategy, the extent to which electoral politics is present in labor/community collaboration also reflects efforts to make up political power lost by the labor movement through the last two decades. This form of labor/community collaboration has been particularly effective with Latino CBOs, whose constituency has historically voted in support of pro-labor Democratic candidates. This also reflects the extent to which predominantly ethnic and multi ethnic CBOs, in particular Latino CBOs, have been effective through the late eighties and nineties, in increasing immigrant naturalization and voter participation rates. Such alliances have been in the form of labor support for naturalization services, and direct collaborative participation in voter registration drives and get-out-to-vote efforts.

Consistent with organized labor's shift in recent years toward a greater emphasis on labor organizing, 54 percent of those unions involved in labor/community collaboration were also engaged in community-based efforts to mobilize support for union organizing efforts. This reflects organized labor's shift toward organizing low-wage immigrant workers and recognition of the importance of community support in the unionization of immigrant workers (Fine 1998; Ness 1998). One of the most successful examples of this form of labor/community collaboration is Service Employee's International Union's (SEIU) Justice for Janitor unionization campaign in Los Angeles, which was not only effective in achieving wage increases for its members city-wide, but effectively mobilized broad-based solidarity among many of Los Angeles' labor, faith-based and progressive community groups, thereby contributing to greater public support for this and other unionization campaigns for low-wage workers in the city.

As collaboration between unions and CBOs come to play an increasingly important role in union efforts to impact policy and mobilize support for unionization efforts, the establishment of broad-based coalitions has become an increasingly common organizational form of labor/community collaboration. Nearly 70 percent of the unions surveyed are also participating in one or more labor/community coalition efforts to address broader social issues. Coalitions to pass local living wage ordinances ranked at the top of social issues unions were collaborating with CBOs, with 62 percent of the unions participating. This was followed by 46 percent for coalitions addressing health care reform, and nearly one-third for advocating for immigrant rights (see table 2).

Table 2 Social Issues Being Addressed by Unions in Labor/Community Coalitions

Social Issue	No.	%
Living wage	49	62
Health care reform	36	45.6
Immigrant rights	25	31.6
Welfare reform	23	29.1
Education reform	23	29.1
Environmental	17	21.5

Numbers and percentages calculated from the 79 unions currently participating in one or more labor/community coalitions toward addressing social issues.

While the survey data indicates that CBOs, as a sector, have a high propensity to be engaged in collaborative efforts with other CBOs, it also indicates that they are less frequently engaged in collaborative efforts with unions. This may be due to the diversity of the CBO survey sample, which included traditional non profit service providers. Of the one hundred CBOs surveyed, 72 percent were actively participating in ongoing coalitions effort around community organizing or advocacy activities, yet only 40 percent had any experience in working cooperatively with unions or other worker organizations. However, for those CBOs involved in labor-related advocacy or organizing, collaborative working relations with unions were quite common, with 83 percent of these CBOs working with unions. As for the type of labor-related advocacy and organizing these CBOs were engaged in, over 60 percent were involved in worker rights education, and just over one-half were involved in labor advocacy. Only 31 percent were involved in organizing workers, and 17 percent in labor related research (see table 3).

Table 3 CBOs participating in Labor-Related Advocacy and Organizing

Program Type	No.	%
Worker rights education	22	62
Labor advocacy	19	54
Organizing workers	11	31
Labor research	6	17
Other	6	17

The numbers and percentages calculated from the 35 CBOs currently involved in labor-related advocacy or organizing activities.

Recognizing the link between the poverty conditions facing low-income working families in their homes and communities and the low wages and powerlessness they experience at the workplace, increasing numbers of CBOs are reaching out to unions for assistance in community-based development, advocacy, and organizing efforts. Furthermore, in the wake of increased government devolution and shrinking social programs, CBOs serving low-income people have been forced to look for new allies. While many CBOs bring with them a broad range of technical skills and experiences, from legal services and policy advocacy to fund development, many also recognize their limitations and consequently the need to seek assistance from other groups. Community concerns that CBOs have sought union support for range from affordable housing, economic development, education, and environmental safety issues, which affect both recent immigrants and other low-wage workers.

Some CBOs have also have sought to expand their advocacy and organizing efforts to include greater support for improved wages and benefits, as well as collective bargaining. Interviews with CBO executive directors indicate that in some cases it has been through their participation in broad-based coalitions addressing economic justice issues that they have come to work with unions for the first time, and in the process have become more aware of the advantages of ongoing collaboration. For example, of those 26 CBOs which were participating in efforts to pass local living wage ordinances, approximately two-thirds are working cooperatively with unions, versus less than a quarter of those not participating in living wage campaigns. The primary reasons CBOs gave for their participation in living wage campaigns

were a desire to both improve wage and benefits standards for workers and to strengthen the collective voice in support of worker issues. In summary, their reasons for participation in living wage campaigns included: to increase the wages and benefits for affected low-wage workers (83 percent), to raise the overall wage and benefits standard generally for workers in the region (75 percent), to broaden labor/community cooperation in the region (50 percent) and to help unionization efforts (44 percent).

The emergence of broad-based coalitions of labor and CBOs is significantly changing the political and public policy landscape in California and nationwide as these new alliances give greater voice to low-wage workers and bring together progressive sectors concerned with issues of economic justice. One need only look at the impact made by the broad-based coalition in Seattle in opposition to the free trade policies of the World Trade Organization, or the newly established coalition of immigrant rights advocates and the AFL-CIO in support of a renewed amnesty program, to see the potential for affecting state, national and even global policy. The impact can also be seen in the effectiveness of the statewide alliance between Latino CBOs and organized labor in California's 1998 gubernatorial election. At the local level, labor/community coalitions are effectively impacting local economic development policy and establishing higher local wage and benefit standards while providing greater protection for organizing workers. One clear example of the effectiveness in such collaborations is the passage of local living wage ordinances in cities and counties throughout California, some of which include labor neutrality and worker retention clauses.

Living Wage Campaigns as a Model For Labor/Community Collaboration

Where the survey findings provide an overview of the extent and basic characteristics of labor/community collaboration, case studies, such as the Ventura County's living wage campaign, provide an even greater understanding of the process of collaboration. The living wage campaign currently underway in the County of Ventura illustrates the potential of such alliances to impact the wage and benefit standards of low-wage workers at the local level, while also strengthening the overall capacity of working families and their advocates for unionization efforts and initiatives affecting working families. Formed in December 1997 as the outcome of a series of community meetings initiated by several local CBOs to discuss the prospect of passing living wage ordinances in a number of Ventura County cities, the Ventura County Living Wage Coalition (VCLWC) has established itself as a broad-based multi ethnic regional coalition made up of over 40 community, labor, faith, student and environmental based organizations. While the VCLWC continues its campaign to secure the passage of its first local living wage ordinance in the region, the coalition has been successful in mobilizing public support for living wage proposals currently before the City of Oxnard and County of Ventura. As a result of the success of VCLWC organizing efforts, in November 1999, the County of Ventura adopted "in concept" a county living wage ordinance, with formal adoption of an ordinance expected by the end of 2000. The City of Oxnard is also considering a VCLWC proposed living wage ordinance, scheduled for a council vote in the fall of 2000.

Since the passage of the Baltimore living wage ordinance in 1994, as many as 35 living wage ordinances have been passed nationwide, including eight in California. California cities and counties that have passed living wage ordinances include Los Angeles City, Los Angeles County, Pasadena, Oakland, San Jose, San Francisco and Berkeley. While the scope and enforcement capacity of each ordinance is different, the underlying premise is to create minimum standards that raise the income floor for low-wage workers and redirect the future path of the economy (Zabin and Martin 1999). Modeled after living wage ordinances already passed in several cities and counties, the ordinances being proposed by the VCLWC higher wages, health benefits and removal of some obstacles to union organizing (Vargas 1999).

Just as in other communities where living wage campaigns have been waged, the Ventura County living wage campaign has provided a number of CBOs the opportunity to participate, often for the first time, in solidarity actions with labor, as well as collaborative efforts with local unions. Of the thirteen surveyed Ventura County CBOs involved in living wage campaigns, over half were currently working cooperatively in one form or another with labor unions, in contrast with only one of the surveyed CBOs which was not involved in the living wage effort. Interviews with several CBO executive directors

indicated that for a majority of these CBOs, the living wage effort was the first time, as an organization, that they had worked collaboratively with unions.

The VCLWC's emphasis on coalition building as one of the primary elements of its mission is reflected in CBO coalition members' attitude toward their establishing new collaborative working relations with unions. In comparison with the reasons given for living wage coalition participation by the overall sample of CBOs, Ventura County CBOs participating in the local living wage effort placed a significantly greater importance on "broadening labor/community cooperation." Since the formation of the VCLWC, CBO coalition members have participated in labor organizing efforts, including support for United Farm Workers actions to organize mushroom workers, independent unionization of packinghouse workers, and SEIU's home-care worker organizing efforts. Union support for CBO mobilizations and lobbying efforts have included public support and testimony on behalf of proposed affordable housing projects and efforts to ban the use of the pesticide Methyl Bromide in proximity to schools.

Like the City of Los Angeles' living wage ordinance, ordinances proposed by the VCLWC include measures to directly improve the climate for unionization. VCLWC ordinances include "worker retention" and "labor peace" provisions. The worker retention provision provides for job security at the point when the employer's contract and/or lease with the public agency expires, by requiring any new contractors to retain the workers of the previous contractor for 90 days. Pioneered by San Jose's labor peace, or labor neutrality ordinance provision, Ventura County ordinances would restrict contractors, lessees and subsidy recipients from using public funds to influence workers on the question of unionization, thereby avoiding the all too common practice of hiring high paid union busters to break unionization efforts. The VCLWC ordinance also includes an "opt out" clause, which allows specific terms of the ordinance to be superseded by a collective bargaining contract. As seen by the effective use of similar pro-labor provisions included in the Los Angeles City ordinance, the VCLWC will have positioned itself to only offer support for new developments in return for compliance with living wage neutrality in the event of organizing drives.

As the VCLWC advances in its campaign to pass living wage ordinances in the City of Oxnard and the County of Ventura, it has become increasingly successful in engaging affected workers into coalition actions. Because those workers to be affected by living wage ordinances are, for the most part, unorganized and have not yet been targeted for unionization campaigns, traditional labor organizing methods have not been used. Such efforts generally require full-time labor organizers. Ventura County's living wage effort, unlike most living wage campaigns, has been undertaken on a strictly volunteer basis without funded staff support. Without funds to hire full-time organizers, efforts to engage affected workers have taken the form of outreach methods used by CBOs, such as community meetings, tables at community events, visibility on the local English and Spanish media, and presentations to community associations and church groups and to workers participating in retraining efforts. Volunteers can more easily conduct such efforts. By far the most successful has been an arrangement established with the Center for Employment Training (CET) to provide presentations to unemployed or underemployed workers seeking retraining. Such mobilizations have served to bring the voice of low-wage workers and their families into the local policy arena, providing testimony and participation at county board of supervisors and city council meetings.

Living wage efforts can provide avenues for addressing other policy issues affecting working families, including policies to increase the number of employers providing health coverage for non-union workers. For example, while all living wage ordinances seek to raise the wages of low-wage workers, the inclusion of employer health coverage incentives within living wage ordinances, along with the mobilization of broad-based coalition actions, can place greater attention on legislation and other remedies toward addressing the severe lack of health coverage for working families. Drawing from the living wage ordinance adopted by the City of Los Angeles in 1997, ordinances currently before the Ventura Board of Supervisors and Oxnard City Council include provisions for health benefits. Under these proposals, employees of city and county contractors, subsidy recipients and lessees of \$25,000 or more are required to pay their employees \$8 an hour with health benefits, or \$10 without. Like the Los Angeles ordinance, the Ventura County and Oxnard ordinances reflect the importance of health benefits

in compensation packages for low-wage workers and affirm the role of employers in ensuring that workers have access to health care.

In recognizing the high cost of insurance premiums as an argument by employers for not providing health coverage to their workers, efforts by the have included the convening of a regional taskforce to begin to address health coverage as a local policy issue. Under most HMOs and PPOs, the additional \$2 per hour in health benefits in lieu of the higher wage, required by the VCLWC's ordinances, is sufficient for employers under group purchasing plans to provide health insurance for their workers with dependents. However, underwriting requirements for firms of fewer than 50 employees can result in premiums above \$2 per hour for coverage of workers and their families. For this reason, the VCLWC has also organized a county taskforce on healthcare for working families, with the mission of investigating new options to improve low wage workers' access to healthcare coverage, including the possible provision of managed care through the county's existing public hospital and clinics. Participants in the taskforce include employers, insurance underwriters, labor, physicians, health advocates, CBO service providers, and a policy expert from UCLA's Lewis Center for Policy Studies.

As a means of sustaining the long-term viability of labor/community living wage coalitions as regional institutions for economic justice, numerous coalitions around the country have evolved new collaborative organizations that can integrate strategies for organizing, policy development, and alliance building (Zabin 1999). In some cases, the living wage coalition has directly established the new organization, such as in the case of Oakland, which formed a new organization after the passage of the ordinance. Early recognition of the need for such an organization has prompted the establishment of a new non profit umbrella organization in order to sustain the coalition of labor and community groups, as well as to support the existing living wage campaign.

Drawing from hybrid organizational models, such as Sustainable Milwaukee, San Jose's Working Partnership and the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), the VCLWC has undertaken the establishment of its own regional non profit organization, Tri-Counties Costal Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE). Established as a non profit popular research, information and educational center for the study of sustainable economic policies and development activities in Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo, CAUSE will serve as an umbrella organization for social, economic and environmental justice initiatives. With committed funding from several progressive foundations, CAUSE will also provide a means for raising foundation grants in support of such efforts as the living wage campaign, a health coverage taskforce and the development of a regional worker center, by convening participatory research efforts and providing such activities as policy research and analysis, technical assistance, staff support and popular education.

Conclusion

The emergence of new forms of labor/community collaborations reflect a growing recognition by unions and CBOs of the need to strengthen the voice of workers and to build the collective capacity of these organizations in support of those workers left behind in the new economy. This recognition is based in large part on labor's need to recover dramatic losses in union membership, which have taken place over the last half-century. This, in turn, has resulted in labor's shift toward organizing unorganized workers, which, in states such as California, has meant targeting low-wage, predominantly immigrant workers. Drawing from earlier experiences, such as efforts to organize Mexican farm workers in California during the 1950s and 1960s and recent efforts by immigrant rights and service organizations to organize immigrants throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, unions and CBOs are merging with new social movements for social, economic and environmental justice to establish new forms of labor/community collaboration. As these organizational formations evolve, they also offer the potential for impacting not only local policy, but also state and federal public policy affecting working families, such as issues of health care, education and global free trade policy.

Such collaborative formations also raise consciousness of the plight of low-wage workers and their families and the important role each group plays in addressing these issues, while also bringing together the strengths of each group to improve the overall capacity of workers and their advocates. In

the process, both unions and CBOs learn important skills and gain insights from each other. For example, unions can learn new approaches to leadership development, multiculturalism, fund development and relationship building from CBOs. CBOs, in turn can learn tactics from unions for turning commitment and activity into organization. Joint efforts in leadership development, workers centers, research, and lobbying are programmatic examples, which draw on the best of both groups (Needleman 1998).

Lastly, social movements for economic justice, such as living wage campaigns, can offer new models toward empowering and improving the lives of low-wage workers, while also nurturing community/labor solidarity and collaboration. The strategic inclusion of measures to improve the climate for unionization in living wage ordinances, such as worker retention and labor neutrality provisions, serves to further support local unionization efforts. Furthermore, by incorporating provisions in living wage ordinances which not only seek higher wage standards for employees of city and county contracts but also provide incentives for the provision of health benefits as well as greater accountability in economic development, living wage campaigns can place the needs of low-wage workers and their families on the local policy agenda. Lastly, broad-based labor and community collaboratives facilitate the mobilization of affected workers, their families and neighbors, thereby expanding the overall capacity of workers to affect needed change and strengthening their collective voice.

References

- Acuña, Rodolfo. 1988. *Occupied America: History of Chicanos*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Bacon, David. 1996. "Contesting the Price of Mexican Labor: Immigrant Workers Fight for Justice." In *Beyond Identity Politics*, ed. John Anner. Boston: South End Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, Kate, Sheldon Friedman, Richard W. Hurd, Rudolph A. Oswald, and Ronald L. Seeber, 1998. *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*. Ithaca: ILR Press.
- Conrad, Susan. 1997. "Living Wage Campaigns as Economic Development." Pp. 1-20 in *Critical Planning*. Vol. 4. UCLA, Los Angeles: Department of Urban Planning.
- Fine, Janice. 1998. "Moving Innovation from the Margins to the Center." Pp. 119-146 in *A New Labor Movement for the New Century*, ed. Gregory Mantsios. New York: Monthly Review.
- Garcia, Mario. 1994. *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Mollenkopf, John. 1983. *The Contested City*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Needleman, Ruth. 1998. "Building Relationships for the Long Haul: Unions and Community Based Groups Working Together to Organize Low Wage Workers." Pp. 71-101 in *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, ed. Kate Bronfenbrenner et al. Ithaca: ILR Press.
- Nissen, Bruce. 1995. *Fighting for Jobs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Reitz, Donald and Dietrich Reitz. 1987. *The Alinsky Legacy: Alive and Kicking*. London: Aijai Press Inc.
- Tjerandsen, Carl. 1980. *Education for Citizenship: A Foundation's Experience*. Santa Cruz, CA: Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation, Inc.
- Vargas, Marcos. 1999. "A Living Wage? People Need It, Responsibility Demands It, Good Policy Backs It." *The Los Angeles Times*, 28 November, editorial section.
- Vargas, Marcos. 1999. "Transformative Community Practice: New Populism, Social Movements, and Progressive Latino Politics," Pp. 63-75 in *Critical Planning*. Vol. 6. Los Angeles: UCLA Department of Urban Planning.
- Zabin, Carol, and Martin Isaac. 1999. *Living Wage Campaigns in the Economic Policy Arena: Four Case Studies from California*. Center for Labor Research and Education, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California Berkeley.

Endnotes

¹ The Future of Work and Health study of California unions and CBOs was conducted by the UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations under a grant funded by the Wellness Foundation. The study's primary data was derived from two separate mail surveys of unions and CBOs, conducted from September 1999 to February 2000, targeting unions and CBOs in the counties of Los Angeles, Alameda, Orange, Ventura and Fresno. The study derived its survey universe of 800 unions and CBOs from union and non profit service directories and membership lists from associations, labor councils and federations, such as the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. Because of the study's emphasis on health and safety related issues relating to identified case studies, one-half of the universe of Los Angeles-based unions were segmented to include adequate representation of teachers unions, hospitality unions and health care unions. The other half of the Los Angeles-based union universe was randomly chosen from the County Federation of Labor mailing list. The full CBO survey universe was also segmented to only include non profit community-based advocacy and health and human service organizations.

Union survey questions were broken into eleven categories, including: local union background, health plans, health and safety issues, participation in policy debates, labor/community cooperation, immigration, technological change, union/management cooperation, organizing, government agencies, propositions and general working conditions. Similarly, the CBO survey questions were broken into the following categories: organizational background, community organizing and development activities, labor related activities, health care/environmental/ or worker health and safety issues, and organizational development.

Data generated from the eight case studies was derived from interviews, secondary data sources, such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and literature reviews. The case studies included: Agricultural Workers and Pesticide Health Hazards, Teachers Unions and Violence in Public Schools, Living Wage Campaigns and Employer-based Health Coverage, Joint Worker-Management Efforts at Kaiser Health, Environmental Justice and the AQMD, Health and Safety Efforts of Immigrant Worker Centers, Union Participation in Single Payer Health Legislation, and Union and CBO Welfare to Work Policy Advocacy.