

# **Sweatshop Warriors**

***Immigrant Women Workers  
Take On the Global Factory***

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## Chapter Six

# **“Just-in-Time” Guerrilla Warriors**

## ***Immigrant Workers’ Centers***

Rojana “Na” Cheunchujit delivered an impassioned speech to some 20,000 workers who jammed the Los Angeles Sports Arena at an AFL-CIO rally on June 10, 2000, demanding the end of employer sanctions and unconditional amnesty for undocumented workers. In March 1999, she testified before the California Assembly Committee on Labor and Employment in support of a bill to crack down on sweatshop abuses in California’s \$30 billion garment industry.

The sports stadium and state legislature halls are a long way from the El Monte sweatshop where Cheunchujit and her Thai co-workers were imprisoned behind razor wire—a long way, also, from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detention center where the workers were reincarcerated after their “liberation” by government agents. They are half a world away from the Bangkok garment factories where Cheunchujit sewed as a teenager and the village where she was born and planted rice seedlings with her parents as a child.

Cheunchujit was one of the 72 Thai workers imprisoned as sewing slaves in a sweatshop in El Monte, California which had opened in 1988.<sup>1</sup> When government agents stormed the factory on August 2, 1995, the workers’ terrified faces made front-page headlines and prime-time TV news across the nation. Their case shocked many

who thought that sweatshops were something that existed overseas—not within US borders. The workers' subsequent campaign provoked scrutiny of brand name retailers and manufacturers and helped spur the creation, in August 1996, of a presidential task force to reform the garment industry.<sup>2</sup>

When asked whether workers feared demonstrating against retailers after their release, Cheunchujit laughed. "Participating in the campaign was not scary, not after what we'd been through!... This campaign might help to redistribute the wealth." Cheunchujit had participated in a strike as a young garment worker in Thailand. She found her bearings amidst the confusion at the INS detention center and threw in her lot with the Thai Community Development Center, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, and KIWA who came to get the workers out of jail. She says the groups "really helped us to overcome the terrible things we went through. We felt like we were part of a larger family of people who really cared for us, people who loved us, whom we could trust."<sup>3</sup>

The ethnic-based workers' centers reach, organize, and defend the immigrant, low-waged, ethnic minority women workers who are not protected by the trade union movement. During moments of crisis, workers like Cheunchujit and her co-workers at the El Monte slaveshop, the Korean and Latino restaurant workers in LA's Koreatown, the Mexicana garment workers in El Paso and San Antonio, and the Chinese garment and restaurant workers in New York, Oakland, and San Francisco reached out to these centers.

### **"Just-in-Time" Methods**

The transformation that the women make from sweatshop industry workers to sweatshop warriors is expressed in the development and maturation of the organizations they build to carry out their battles. Like the women's lives, their organizations are shaped by the contradictions and tensions unfolding within the sweatshop industries where the women work and the ethnic communities where they live with their families. The women's position at the bottom of the sweatshop pyramid frames the demands, methodology, culture, look, and feel of their organizations and movements. Even

the modest storefronts and community centers that house their centers often resemble the hole-in-the-wall garment shops where the women toil or the shuttered factories where they used to work.

In many ways, the low-waged immigrant women workers' organizations are the flip side of the "just-in-time" production methods pursued by corporate management. Based on the successes of Japan's auto industry since the 1980s, just-in-time production methods reduce inventory and workforce size via subcontracting out "small batches" of goods, based on closer tracking and categorization of consumer tastes as "special niche" or "micro markets," and quick response to customers trends. The successfully tested products and services of small business innovators are often copied or absorbed by big businesses, who may buy out, subcontract to, or out-compete the small fry. Employers extol these methods with such code words as "flexibility," "lean and mean production," "diversification of risks," and "right sizing." For workers, these methods spell increased competition with and between subcontracted workers, plummeting wages, shrinking benefits, runaway shops, layoffs, temporary work, loss of job security, speed-ups, increased injuries, and heightened discrimination.<sup>4</sup> In short, subcontracted workers act as on-call shock absorbers for the just-in-time system.

Mirroring and intersecting with this restructuring of production within the sweatshop pyramid, the workers' centers respond with just-in-time methods to organize "small batches" and "micro markets" of immigrant, women, and ethnic minority workers segregated at the bottom of the "new economy." These workers are fragmented and divided through the subcontracting system, by ethnicity, gender, and immigrant status, and at times, also by the globalization of their industries. The sweatshop industry workers are joined by workers from larger facilities "downsized" through restructuring who end up scrambling for sweatshop-type jobs where they invariably get paid lower wages with less benefits—if they can even manage to land a job. The women live in poor communities with other people of color. These "niche markets" of low-waged immigrant women workers have often been passed over by the broader labor movement—but not by the "brown

bomber” barrio organizations who recognize these women as family.

Just as corporate management extols “lean and mean” businesses with the “flexibility” to quickly adapt to changing “market conditions” and “environments,” so do the sweatshop industry workers’ organizations learn to maximize scarce resources and “use what they got to get what they need.”<sup>5</sup> Low-waged workers’ organizations do not have much room for error or to squander resources. Like small business innovators within the corporate setting, the workers’ centers within the broader labor movement have to hustle to understand and anticipate changing conditions, while developing their long-term perspective, strategy, and infrastructure to ride out the bust and boom of capitalist business cycles and “keep their eyes on the prize.”

In this respect workers’ centers are a bit like small guerrilla warriors fighting a more heavily armed opponent. They are relatively small, lack resources, and fight class forces with considerably more firepower to both punish those who challenge the status quo and reward the “good Hispanics,” “Asian model minorities,” and other “team players” who rush to the bosses’ defense. These sweatshop warrior organizations are flexible, move quickly, maximize limited resources, organize “outside of the box,” and utilize tactics and strategies based on their ethnic backgrounds—like “war of the flea,” *tai chi*, *jujitsu*, *hapkido*, and the ideas of Gandhi, César Chávez, and the Zapatistas—techniques that deflect and toss their more powerful opponents’ weight back at them. Sometimes Korean and Chinese groups have also been known to use *tae kwon do* and *gung-fu*-like tactics where both opponents just kick and punch each other until one goes down.<sup>6</sup>

From inside the ethnic enclaves, the centers “give props” to workers to take on their co-ethnic bosses as well as the hegemony of large US corporations. The centers offer workers an infrastructure that enables them to take advantage of the experiences and expertise accumulated in prior struggles, develop their consciousness and leadership, connect with other workers and organizations, act as part of a broader movement, and begin to alter the power relations

within the industries and communities where they work and live.<sup>7</sup> The women's organizations operate like "fish swimming in the sea," sharing the common language, culture, history, and interests of the broader base of workers and their communities.

The just-in-time organizations defend workers' rights through different stages of industrial restructuring while simultaneously pursuing independent strategies and alternatives that enable workers to stabilize their lives and movements through the vicissitudes of the market and profit-oriented economy. Because the centers are based within particular ethnic communities, they stick with the workers through thick and thin. They follow immigrant workers into expanding industries and accompany them through deindustrialization, runaway shops, and layoffs. Community-based labor organizing demands a long-term commitment to the workers and community, an accurate grasp of shifting conditions, and development of independent strategies and tactics that enable workers to build their organizations and power not just in defensive/reactive, but also in offensive/proactive ways.

Successfully organizing the growing proportion of female workers requires bringing gender consciousness to labor organizing. Gender oppression plays a huge role in shaping the lives of low-waged immigrant women workers, and the problems they face as women are compounded by their class, race, and nationality status. Immigrant workers' organizations are either women's groups or have gender-specific initiatives within a mixed-gender organization. Thrust into positions of major responsibility, the women in this book fought uphill battles individually and collectively to develop their skills and assert their leadership. They learned to make difficult decisions, run their organizations, and not be stymied by racist, classist, and male chauvinist assaults on their personhood. Like women in other movements, they often encountered sexist practices that devalued their opinions and contributions, a lack of commitment to providing child care and negotiating family responsibilities that impact their participation, and sexual harassment, among other challenges. Those women who shouldered these struggles often had to deal with defensiveness, guilt,

trivialization, backlash, and charges of divisiveness for outing supposedly taboo topics. Nevertheless, through their centers and committees, these battle-scarred working-class pioneers for women's liberation have knocked down doors so that more of their sisters can enter and stay in these movements.<sup>8</sup>

### **Cross-Fertilization within the Labor Movement**

The concurrent reemergence of ethnic-based *mutualistas* and of sweatshops is happening during a stage when some of the labor movement's "standing army battalions"—large trade unions—are in the process of massive rethinking and retooling. When the guerrilla and standing army units share a common perspective and strategy, they can compliment and increase each others' effectiveness in organizing workers across race, gender, industry, and nationality divisions. In today's world of subcontracting, labor market re-segregation, and global economic restructuring, workers will continue to need community-based workers' centers and independent unions.<sup>9</sup> Today's workers' centers represent an updated version of the community labor linkages and social unionism that characterized the struggles of the earlier waves of immigrant workers and the birth of industrial unionism. Just as the AFL-CIO eventually incorporated more diverse ethnicities, the innovations of ethnic workers are often adopted by industry unions, which are always on the lookout for new dues-paying members.

The global economic restructuring process and shifts in the composition of the US workforce since the mid-1960s built up underground, geyser-like pressures that sporadically erupted on the surface of the broader labor movement. Labor radicals have debated and written thoughtfully and persuasively about the need and basis for change in the trade union movement and provided examples of innovative organizing among particular sectors of unionized workers, including immigrants.<sup>10</sup> They analyzed the significance of the 1995 victory of John Sweeney, Richard Trumka, and Linda Chávez-Thompson; the dismantling of the cold war vintage American Institute for Free Labor Development; the movement of many radical labor activists into the AFL-CIO's national organizing, edu-

cation, and women's departments; labor's role in the Congressional defeat of NAFTA fast tracking in 1997; labor's participation in the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization in 1999 despite tremendous pressure from the Democratic Party not to embarrass the moderate presidential candidate Al Gore; and the February 2000 AFL-CIO shift to oppose employer sanctions and call for unconditional amnesty for undocumented workers.<sup>11</sup>

Immigrants make up a growing proportion of the US labor force and movement, especially in states like California, Texas, New York, and Florida. According to the 2000 Census, Latinos have grown to 12 percent of the US population, and 32 percent of California's, while Asians make up 4 percent and 12 percent respectively.<sup>12</sup> California is returning to its pre-Mexico annexation, and pre-anti-Asian exclusion acts demographic mix.<sup>13</sup> According to the *New York Times* labor reporter Steven Greenhouse, the Los Angeles labor movement, by focusing on organizing immigrant workers, is bringing in new members faster than unions anywhere else in the country. In 1999, 74,000 LA home care workers, most of whom were Latina/os, voted to unionize in the largest successful US organizing drive since the 1930s.<sup>14</sup>

The just-in-time guerrilla groups have influenced segments of the trade union movement, especially in those industries and cities where the workers' centers operate. The relationship between the centers and unions depends principally on the politics of the particular union, including its stance towards employers; its willingness to fight for the rights of workers; the weight it gives to organizing, education, training and promotion of rank-and-file leadership; and its relationship with community and other social movements. Since many of the unions themselves are highly fractured internally, at times the relationship between the workers' centers and unions also depends on the stance of key leaders and organizers representing different political perspectives and constituencies within the unions. In some cases the relationship is more contentious,<sup>15</sup> but in others, more cooperative.<sup>16</sup>

Collective bargaining agreements, workers' centers, and unions, whether independent or AFL-CIO, are all tools that workers

must hone to sharpness. When a tool grows dull, or when the environment or task changes, tools can cease to be useful. Many labor veterans inside and outside of the AFL-CIO critique organized labor's stagnation; indifference toward immigrants, women, and people of color; and degeneration into profit-making institutions investing and managing workers' pensions, benefit funds, and fixed assets.

Like AFL-CIO unions, workers' centers can also fall into cautious, service-oriented, toothless groups if they do not develop workers' leadership, link up with other campaigns for justice, and alter power relations within the sweatshop pyramid. The workers' centers must also struggle against accepting the premises and structures of ghettoization and segregation imposed on immigrant, women, and racial minority workers from the bosses and, all too often, accommodated by other institutions inside and outside the labor movement.

In an effort to define the methodology that would enable workers' groups to maintain a militant, worker-oriented, bottom-up character, CSWA and La Mujer Obrera initiated the National Consortium of Workers' Centers in 1994, which invited workers to build a "new labor movement." The consortium principles called for organizing workers across trade lines; bringing together community and workplace struggles; building leadership from the bottom up; raising workers' capacities, skills, consciousness, leadership, and communication through the fight for basic necessities; not being service agencies; and fighting sexism, racism, and discrimination.<sup>17</sup> The following campaigns highlight some of the organizing innovations of these immigrant workers' groups.

### **Anti-Corporate Campaigns**

Much of the day-to-day work of the centers is assisting workers in fighting disputes with employers around violation of their wage, hour, and safety rights. But when large corporations have shrugged off responsibility, the centers have launched anti-corporate campaigns to force them to the bargaining table. Employers have access to many corporate "hired guns"—management consultants, finan-

cial institutions, government agencies, elected officials, academic associations, and mainstream media advocates to assist them in running their businesses, including "handling labor problems." To effectively deal with employers, workers also need to develop their own set of relations with other groups and institutions with whom they share common interests. Often, immigrants' children and subsequent generations act as bridges between the sweatshop warriors and other sections of the US population, as well as other workers at the bottom of the sweatshop pyramid. In some cases, workers' campaigns have even won over employers who were trying to treat their employees fairly and also felt squeezed by manufacturers and retailers.

The use of boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, non-violent civil disobedience, and mass mobilization by the civil rights movement in the 1960s provided valuable lessons for immigrant workers of color. The United Farm Workers Union (UFW) launched its national grape boycott in the 1960s to broaden the front pressuring the growers to negotiate with the Mexican and Filipino farm workers. The campaign trained farm workers and youth "on-the-job" by dispatching them to cities around the nation to seed and grow boycott committees in diverse communities to support *la causa*.<sup>18</sup> A young generation of Chicana/o and Filipina/o activists cut their teeth on this struggle. During the 1970s, Chicana/o and Chinese activists also developed anti-corporate campaigns in support of striking Farah and Jung Sai workers.

In 1990, Fuerza Unida was the first of the workers' centers featured in this book to launch a nationwide boycott. AIWA launched the Jessica McClintock boycott and Garment Workers Justice Campaign in 1992; KIWA and their Sweatshop Watch partners launched the Retailers Accountability Campaign in 1995; and CSWA and NMASS initiated the DKNY "girl"cott in 1999. Each campaign merits its own book, but will be briefly spotlighted below.

### **Levi's, Button Your Fly: Your Greed Is Showing**

Fuerza Unida's campaign against Levi's represented one of the major fightbacks by laid-off workers against deindustrialization and

runaway shops during the 1990s. This campaign was organized and led by *non-unionized*, Mexicana and Chicana garment workers, with help from a small, local independent union, the Southwest Public Workers Union. Hundreds of thousands of auto, garment, shoe, electronics, plastics, and other manufacturing workers had lost their jobs by the time of the 1990 San Antonio layoffs. Fuerza Unida helped create a bridge linking the plant closures movement of the 1970s and 1980s with the anti-sweatshop, anti-corporate movement it helped bring into prominence in the 1990s.

Beginning with emergency mass meetings at Our Lady of the Angels Church in San Antonio's Southside barrio, Fuerza Unida went on to launch a national boycott that garnered solidarity from labor, community, religious, economic justice, student, and youth organizations around the country and overseas. Thousands of supporters sent sheared off Levi's labels to company CEO Robert Haas.<sup>19</sup> Workers organized community tribunals in San Antonio and San Francisco and the women took turns traveling to San Francisco to bring the campaign to Levi's corporate headquarters. Actions included the first protest at the exclusive San Francisco Pacific Heights home of Levi's corporate family patriarch and protests and hunger strikes in front of Levi's outlets in cities across the nation.

While the company continued to stonewall San Antonio workers, its second round of layoffs in 1997-1999 revealed how many "goodies" Fuerza Unida's "piñata-busters" had knocked loose from corporate coffers. When Levi's announced plans to lay-off some 6,400 workers at 11 US plants in 1997, the supposed generosity of its severance package was heralded by UNITE as "by far the best severance settlement apparel workers have ever gotten."<sup>20</sup> Levi's acknowledged that "There's no denying that San Antonio in 1990 had something to do with the development of these benefits in 1997," and that Levi's had failed to anticipate how much criticism it would receive from the San Antonio community.<sup>21</sup>

Fuerza Unida's struggle may have also delayed the layoff of thousands of workers by several years. Levi's had fired thousands of US workers—in 1982, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989, before it hit the San Antonio workers in 1990. A seven-year lull followed before the

company resumed layoffs in 1997, 1998, and 1999, dumping half of its US and Canadian workers and 20 percent of its European staff. Simultaneously, management announced plans to expand production in China, Mexico, and the Caribbean.<sup>22</sup>

Fuerza Unida's campaign also caused the image-conscious corporation to dole out more money to community organizations through its Project Change diversity initiative, ironically located in communities where Levi's plant closures disproportionately hit people of color.<sup>23</sup> Fuerza Unida may have also helped ACTWU/UNITE get into Levi's plants, since it was likely seen as a "team player," business-oriented union that would cooperate with the company. In 1994 during the merger between ACTWU and ILGWU, and the negotiations with Levi's to gain the company's voluntary recognition of the union's card check agreement, ILGWU cut a deal with the management to get other local unions' to stop supporting Fuerza Unida.<sup>24</sup> Two days into Fuerza Unida's 21-day hunger strike at corporate headquarters, Levi's and ACTWU announced their joint partnership.<sup>25</sup> Yet the company soon dumped many UNITE members during its 1997-1999 layoffs. According to *Labor Notes*, a progressive labor magazine:

The new closings come just three years after UNITE (then ACTWU) entered a labor-management partnership with Levi Strauss in 1994 to prevent plant closings. UNITE, however, says that while it agreed to the partnership as a job-saving measure, the current plant closings are a different issue.

"We don't think that it has anything to do with the partnership," said UNITE spokesperson Jo-Ann Mort. When the partnership started, she said, the union "knew that business decisions would have to be made."

But the union is saying little beyond that. In [the] statement issued when the layoffs were announced, UNITE highlighted Levi Strauss' "commitment to a high road of management" and compared the company favorably to its competitors in its treatment of workers.<sup>26</sup>

Fuerza Unida continues to serve as an information and counseling center for injured and laid-off workers from Texas to Tennessee,

including workers in the remaining San Antonio Levi's plant, as well as El Paso workers who successfully sued Levi's for forcing them into a job re-entry program that exposed them to ridicule, humiliation and harassment from managers and other factory workers.<sup>27</sup> Sharing their experiences as "early victims of NAFTA" Fuerza Unida co-coordinators Petra Mata and Viola Casares joined protesters in the tear gas filled streets of Quebec, Canada in April 2001 for the Summit of the Americas. The Summit's goal, the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement (FTAA), would extend the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the entire hemisphere.<sup>28</sup>

Like other organizations spearheading intense campaigns against the bosses, Fuerza Unida struggled to balance their anti-corporate campaign work with the distinct membership and organizational development necessary for the group's long-term sustainability as an organization rooted among the women of San Antonio's working-class barrios. This Mexicana *mutualista* "multi-tasked" as an independent union, a displaced and injured workers' organization, an education and leadership training center, a cooperative, and a grassroots women's support group.

### **Garment Workers Justice Campaign**

Predating the Nike, Gap, El Monte, Kathie Lee Gifford, Guess, and other anti-sweatshop campaigns, AIWA's 1992-1996 Garment Workers Justice Campaign (GWJC) served as a watershed not only for Asian immigrant women workers, but also for the broader anti-corporate movement—especially the youth and student sectors of the movement. While Fuerza Unida's campaign targeted a runaway industry Goliath, AIWA's GWJC spotlighted the pyramid structure of the garment industry and manufacturers' responsibility for domestic sweatshop abuses in subcontracted shops. Similar to El Paso,<sup>29</sup> San Antonio,<sup>30</sup> and New York City,<sup>31</sup> by the early 1990s, large San Francisco-based manufacturers like Levi's, Esprit, the Gap, and Banana Republic had already sent much of their production overseas. Medium-sized companies like Jessica McClintock, Koret, Fritz, and Byer subcontracted out to local sweatshops, and

some began to send work to overseas contractors as well.<sup>32</sup>

AIWA launched the GWJC in support of 12 Chinese women who approached the organization after being stiffed out of their back wages. The sweatshop they worked for, the Lucky Sewing Co., closed down after the manufacturer, Jessica McClintock, pulled its contract. Prior to initiating the GWJC, AIWA had conducted a decade of base-building work among Chinese and Chinese-Vietnamese seamstresses and Korean hotel maids and electronics assemblers. Campaign opponents included the manufacturer and its various agents: the manufacturers' association, the contractor that violated the women workers' rights, and retailers that also profited from sweatshop labor. Institutions that stood between the employer and workers during the campaign and played contradictory roles included the Chinese subcontractors' association, the Department of Labor, and ILGWU. The campaign's core included the former Lucky workers; AIWA's Worker Board, membership, and staff; and the national campaign committees in several US cities composed principally of Asian labor, community, and student activists, with support from community, women's, labor, religious, and student organizations inside and outside the Asian community.

The campaign used a consumer boycott, pickets, public actions, supporter mobilization, media coverage, work with elected and government officials, and other tactics to bring the company to the negotiating table. Similar to the anti-sweatshop campaigns of other workers' centers, the GWJC evolved through several different periods reflecting the level of contention between the principal players. These stages can be delineated: from McClintock's 1992 refusal to talk to the women and the launching of the GWJC until her offer of "charitable donations" to workers if they would sign papers saying the manufacturer was not responsible; from a declaration of partial victory for the "charitable donations" until McClintock escalated attacks on the GWJC, AIWA, and KIWA; from McClintock's escalation of attacks until the manufacturer closed down the flagship San Francisco boutique; from broadening the campaign to include retailers' accountability for sweatshop conditions and pickets at Macy's until the Department of Labor blunder of including McClintock

(and Levi's) on its "Fashion Trendsetter" holiday season list of manufacturers; and from the Department of Labor's mistake to negotiations, settlement, and wrap-up of the boycott and campaign in 1996.<sup>33</sup>

Immigrant women workers won an undisclosed cash settlement, an education fund for garment workers to learn about their rights, a scholarship fund for workers and their children, a bilingual hotline for workers to report any violations of their rights in shops contracted with McClintock, and an agreement from both sides to work to improve conditions within the industry.<sup>34</sup> The campaign developed workers' leadership, broke the façade of manufacturers' lack of responsibility for sweatshop abuses, won greater visibility and support for immigrant workers, consolidated AIWA's base among low-income workers, and, together with Fuerza Unida, helped kick-start the broader anti-sweatshop movement.

The GWJC enabled AIWA to refine its educational, leadership development, and organizing methodology and brought another generation of Asian youth and students into community-based struggles for corporate and governmental accountability. AIWA transformed its youth project to one led by the children of garment and other low-waged immigrant women workers. During the early 1990s the GWJC served as a cutting-edge nationwide campaign linking many activists and organizations within the Asian and other economic and environmental justice movements.<sup>35</sup> KIWA used lessons and infrastructure built through the GWJC in its work with the El Monte workers. Eventually the ILGWU/UNITE, the National Labor Committee, and Global Exchange used what they observed of AIWA's campaign in their anti-corporate campaigns against Gap, Nike, and Guess, and in organizing students through Union Summer and United Students Against Sweatshops.<sup>36</sup>

### **Retailers Accountability Campaign**

Just as the Jessica McClintock campaign threw a spotlight on the role of manufacturers in the garment industry, so did the El Monte case on the increasingly powerful role of retailers in setting wages and working conditions. The case marked a major turning

point in the development and visibility of immigrant sweatshop industry workers struggles, with ripple effects within the industry, government enforcement agencies, and the broader anti-sweatshop movement. In August 1995, Chanchanit "Chancee" Martorell, director of the Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC) in Los Angeles, got a call from the State Labor Commissioner's office to accompany and translate for agents raiding a sweatshop in El Monte, California, where Thai and other immigrant workers toiled behind razor wire and locked gates. Martorell agreed on the condition that workers would not be sent to the INS. After the August 2 raid, however, the INS re-incarcerated the El Monte workers in detention centers for interrogation and possible deportation.

KIWA, which shares office space with Thai CDC and the Pilipino Workers' Center, had accumulated some guerrilla tactics and infrastructure from the AIWA's GWJC that proved very helpful to the El Monte workers. KIWA organizer Paul Lee said when the INS re-incarcerated the workers, "That's when the roller coaster started."<sup>37</sup> Thai CDC, KIWA, and other groups quickly cobbled together the Sweatshop Watch coalition to respond. Throughout the hectic months of the campaign, Thai CDC took on the Thai workers' survival, social service, and translation needs; Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC), the workers' legal issues; and KIWA, the campaign organizing for retailers' accountability.

According to Lee, the enormity of the case came to light five days after the raid when the government made public the major brand name manufacturers and retailers who had contracted with the shop over the previous five years. KIWA launched the Retailers Accountability Campaign (RAC) after retailers denied responsibility for the abuses. KIWA organized holiday shopping season actions against targeted retailers such as Sears, Robinson's May, Bull-ocks/Macy's, Nordstrom, Neiman Marcus, Target/Dayton Hudson, and Montgomery Ward, pressuring some to the negotiating table.<sup>38</sup>

Twenty-four Latina/o workers approached KIWA in December 1995, describing how they had also been exploited by the same owners. KIWA ultimately represented 55 Latina/os in a lawsuit

against the retailers that employed the sweatshop subcontractor, while APALC filed the lawsuit for the Thai workers. Thai CDC, KIWA, and APALC organized monthly general meetings of the Thai and Latino workers to exchange information, analyze developments, map out strategies, and plan actions.<sup>39</sup>

The El Monte campaign demonstrates how solidarity between different ethnic workers can be built and how community organizations with *relatively* more developed infrastructures (like the 1.5 generation Korean-American organizers in KIWA) can help support newer emergent communities (like the Thai). KIWA runs a Summer Activist Training program for young Asians of diverse national origins and works in partnership with Central American and Mexican immigrant worker organizers of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles. In January 2001, various Asian, Chicano, and ethnically mixed groups jointly opened the Garment Workers Center in the heart of LA's fashion district.

In July 1999, nearly four years after the government raid on the El Monte sweatshop, the workers won over \$4 million from major companies—including Montgomery Ward, Mervyn's, Miller's Outpost, B.U.M. Equipment, and Tomato, Inc.—all of whom initially denied responsibility for the sweatshop conditions of their subcontractor.<sup>40</sup> The campaigns of the Thai and Latina/o workers in Los Angeles and the Chinese workers in Oakland spurred passage of a California state legislative bill, AB 633, which imposed a "wage guarantee" in the garment industry so that manufacturers and retailers who manufacture their own private label clothing must pay workers their minimum wage and overtime compensation when the contractors they use fail to do so, as well as other measures.<sup>41</sup>

### **National Mobilization to End Sweatshops and the "Ain't I a Woman?!" Campaign**

While organizing Jing Fong restaurant workers and garment workers in different shops in 1995, CSWA experienced a big influx of Chinese high school and college students. Many stayed on to work in CSWA's Youth Group and in a number of other capacities in the organization, creating a process of fusion between genera-

tions and the launching of the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops (NMASS) in 1996. As CSWA's positive assertion of how to build a mass anti-sweatshop movement from the bottom up, NMASS seeks to build a "new civil rights movement" among all those who are hit by the spread of sweatshop-like conditions. NMASS calls for class, race, and gender solidarity between all those oppressed by the corporate system, instead of asking for consumers' sympathy for sweatshop victims. NMASS campaigns have increasingly attracted immigrant workers from the Caribbean and Eastern Europe in other industries seeking support in disputes with employers and government agencies.<sup>42</sup>

NMASS took on the defense of Chinese and Latina garment workers at a Donna Karan subcontracted, unionized shop and launched the "Ain't I a Woman?!" Campaign in 1999. That organizing effort propelled workers from other shops to step forward and led to a class action lawsuit against the manufacturer filed by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund on behalf of all Donna Karan garment workers in New York City. Since 1992 the DKNY workers had toiled 70- to 80-hour work weeks and were never paid overtime wages; some did not even earn minimum wage.<sup>43</sup> The women's campaign has also drawn endorsements and solidarity from workers' groups in Asia and Mexico, regions where DKNY's goods have been outsourced and marketed, and from where the immigrant women workers who toil in her shops have migrated.<sup>44</sup> Through this campaign, the workers are pressuring Donna Karan to correct the problem of sweatshop labor *inside* New York City rather than simply shutting down, dumping workers, and running away to other domestic and overseas sweatshops as manufacturers have done many times in the past.

### **Innovator Impacts on Anti-Corporate Movements**

These workers' centers influenced the development of the broader anti-sweatshop and anti-corporate movements. Globalization of the sweatshop pyramid spurred anti-corporate campaigns that stressed corporate abuses of immigrant women workers in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Small, innovative, guerrilla,

workers' centers helped play a spark-plug role by reviving the anti-corporate campaign and boycott as a tool to broaden consciousness and support for the struggles of immigrant women workers against deindustrialization and the spread of sweatshops in US inner city stations of the global assembly line. Workers' center campaigns served multiple functions: making sweatshop industry workers inside the United States visible to the public, including within their own communities; opening up the base for workers' support among other sectors, especially young people; training workers and their organizations and supporters; winning key concessions from employers and spurring greater consciousness and organizing among the growing numbers of people grossed out by corporate greed.

The giant protests that followed—against the World Trade Organization in 1999, the World Bank and IMF in Washington, DC, the national Democratic and Republican conventions in LA and Philadelphia in 2000, and the FTAA in Quebec City in 2001—signaled mounting opposition among youth, workers, environmentalists, and other diverse sectors to global corporate capital and its international financial institutions. Such political moments provided new opportunities for building cross-class, cross-sector, multi-racial fronts, and episodes of fusion between youth, intellectuals, and professionals with those sections of the labor movement most critical of free trade and the brutalization of workers, communities, and the planet. At the same time, the anti-corporate movement has remained highly segregated along class, race, and national lines.

Far too often white, middle-class, and First World organizations have demonstrated little accountability to the workers and communities hardest hit by global economic restructuring and corporate greed.<sup>45</sup> Anti-corporate groups that insert themselves into the sweatshop pyramid structure as middle men in order to negotiate with corporations, governments, and international financial institutions—without respecting the self-determination of grassroots people on the bottom of the pyramid—invariably replicate the top-down approaches of the very institutions they seek to change.

To be effective, anti-corporate campaigns must be linked to worker and grassroots community organizing.<sup>46</sup> Regarding the strategy of boycotts, Sweatshop Watch, a coalition of legal advocates, workers centers, unions, and anti-sweatshop groups in California, has declared that it:

only supports boycotts that are led by workers themselves. Boycotts that are not well organized may harm workers by creating less demand for products, thus forcing workers out of jobs... We believe that boycotts are effective when it is the workers who have decided that that is what they need in order to have their voices heard.<sup>47</sup>

Taking the lead from those on the bottom of the power pyramid upholds the finest traditions of solidarity. The international anti-apartheid movement helped reduce the South African regime to pariah status at the behest of a liberation movement that declared its willingness to weather a global boycott and sanctions in order to force its jailers to sit down at the negotiating table. The sober challenge staring the labor and anti-corporate movements in the face is the protracted, painful struggle of organizing workers and grassroots people "glocally" (globally *and* locally) to force their oppressors to change their ways, to build people and earth-centered alternatives, and to develop cooperative relations of mutual respect and solidarity.

In sum, ethnic-based organizing among sweatshop industry workers provided an early warning signal both of the deleterious effects of global economic restructuring on the most vulnerable workers and the means through which these women could organize to defend themselves. The workers' centers are breathing new life into labor and community organizing. Their guerrilla tactics are tailored to the specific gender, ethnic, cultural, workplace, national, and local characteristics of the workers they are organizing. They help workers navigate new territory and negotiate the borders where the different languages, cultures, and institutions of women's home and adopted countries meet. They promote a strong sense of class, ethnic, and gender consciousness among women workers by using a variety of methods to develop their leadership and organizing

capacities. As the women have begun to rock the industries and communities where they live and work, their struggles have rippled out and raised waves—and hopes—in the broader labor, anti-sweatshop, and anti-corporate movements.



Jay Mendoza of the Pilipino Workers Center; Paul Lee, KIWA; Rojana “Na” Cheunchujit, El Monte workers struggle; and Chancee Martorell of the Thai Community Development Center at their joint offices.

Photo by Miriam Ching Yoon Louie (1997)

## **Rojana “Na” Cheunchujit**

### **Former garment worker in El Monte, California Veteran Leader**

*The Thai workers got help from the Thai CDC, which was launched in 1993 in the wake of two major events: the 1992 Los Angeles civil unrest in which Thai shops mistaken for Korean businesses were destroyed and the earthquake in Northridge, California that left many Thai immigrants homeless. According to Thai CDC's Chancee Martorell, some 50,000 Thai immigrants living in Los Angeles came in three waves. The first wave came in the late 1950s and early 1960s as students and professionals to get education and training to bring back to Thailand. The second wave came after the 1965 immigration reforms and included entrepreneurs and students funded by the Thai government. The third and largest wave has come from the 1970s to the present. Like the El Monte slave-shop workers, many migrated from rural parts of north and north-east Thailand due to industrial and golf course displacement of subsistence farmers. While some found jobs working in factories in Bangkok, others migrated to the Middle East, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States.*

*Thai CDC estimates that some 50 percent of the immigrants are undocumented, with many working in indentured servitude to employers who paid “borses” to arrange their passage and placement. Chinese and Vietnamese crime rings also operate brothels of sex trafficked and prostituted women from Thailand and mainland China. Thai CDC offers a number of programs to help newcomers gain survival language skills; access to legal, immigration, housing, job support, community economic development, and family services; and workers' rights training and defense.<sup>48</sup> Thai CDC shares office space with KIWA and Pilipino Workers Center, which organizes Filipino workers in the health industry and in solidarity with labor, migrant, and national liberation struggles in the Philippines and the Filipina/o diaspora.<sup>49</sup>*

I was born January 26, 1970, in Thailand in the village of Petchaboon. My parents worked in the rice fields when I was growing up. I have one brother and two sisters and I am the oldest. I have two children; my daughter is six years old now and my son is five.

I went to school in Thailand, but only for nine years, and finished middle school. I sewed eight or nine years in Thailand, starting

when I was 15 but sometimes would do other things. A village elder introduced me and my husband. I didn't want to get married, [laughs] but I didn't want my parents to worry about me so I got married when I was 19. My husband got a job working as an electrician and got paid pretty good wages.

After I got married sometimes I continued to help my parents work on the farm, but I [also] got sewing jobs to support them. I worked in a big factory in Bangkok, and in many sewing factories before coming to the US. But one place was kind of big and special. My friends told me about the job there. During the two years at work right before coming to the US the pay was pretty good, it was better than my other jobs. Before that, the pay and working conditions were pretty bad.

I came to the US in 1994. When I was still in Thailand this person came to the village to recruit people to work at the shop in El Monte. He told me that the pay was very good. He said that if I wanted to come to the US, he would be able to arrange it for me for 125,000 baht [US\$5,000] which I paid him.

I came to the US with my friends, not with my family. I thought I would stay and work in the US for three years. What happened to me after I came? [laughs] Well, that's a long story! I was locked up in the sewing shop by the owners. They fed us poorly. Then the government put me in a second jail. As soon as I arrived in this country, they took me directly to El Monte [where] they basically told me I would have to work continually, non-stop and only have a day off from time to time. This was completely the opposite of what I had been told in Thailand before coming here. In Thailand they told us that we would work from 8am to 6pm every day, five days a week, and that we would have two days off every week. After they told us the situation in El Monte, I realized I had been duped.

Before arriving here they said we could come and go as we pleased, go shopping for our own groceries, and do things with the money we made. But of course when we got here we weren't allowed to go in and out of the factory at all; we were imprisoned.

There were over 70 Thai workers at the shop. We worked 20 hours a day for the whole one year and four months I was there

—until the day I was liberated. I cooked for myself. We ordered food from the owners, but they charged us really high prices, at least twice the amount.

After paying the \$5,000 to get here, they told me I had to pay an additional \$4,800. They said they would keep me as long as it took to pay off the \$4,800 debt. It didn't matter to them how long they kept you; no specific amount of time was calculated.

The family that owned the business ran different places, and two of the family members supervised us. The factory was a set of duplex apartments, lettered from A to G. The units are basically on one side and on the other side was the driveway and a little grass area. Each unit had two stories. Some of the owners' family members lived in Unit A and Unit F, on both ends, while we workers were spread out between Units B and D.

The owners threatened to set the homes of our families on fire if we dared to escape because they knew where all of us were from, about our villages back in Thailand. Some people actually got punished. One person tried to escape but was unsuccessful; they beat him up pretty badly. They took a picture of him and showed it to all the other workers, to tell us what would happen if we tried to escape. It was unbearable to look at the worker who was beaten; they really messed him up completely. After the beating you couldn't even recognize him at all. They did this to intimidate us.

The day the government raided the factory, we heard knocking on the door; they went to each unit and banged real hard. The banging woke us up and we were so scared that we didn't know what to do. We had been told by the owners never to open the door so we felt really unsure. We didn't know if we were finally going to be set free or if we were going to get in more trouble. So no one dared to open the door. The doors were locked from the outside to keep us in. If there had ever been a fire there was no way that we could have gotten out; we would have been trapped.

One of the policemen broke down the door and shoved it in. In fact he hit one of the workers on the forehead—my friend Kanit. Her head got swollen where she was hit [causing] a huge knot [to swell up] on her forehead. [shakes her head] We were all told to

come out, sit down in the driveway, and just wait. Then later they sent the INS bus to take us away to the detention center.

Oh, my God! We were all so confused. We were interviewed by everyone, by the Department of Labor, by the INS, by lots and lots of people [including the US Attorney's office, State Labor Commissioner's office, and Employment Development Department]. Then about two or three days after we had been in detention, we met the folks from the Thai CDC and KIWA. But that was after the Thai Counsel General had already come and spoken with us.

When the Consul General came to see us, he told us to go back home to Thailand, that there was no need for us to be here. He said we were here illegally and what we did was wrong. He said it was our fault that we put ourselves in this situation. He said that we were just fighting against a brick wall by staying here, and we were being a burden on the US government!

Everybody was confused. We didn't know what to do. Me too, I was confused. But I got one idea after I met Chancee [Thai CDC Director], Julie [Asian Pacific American Legal Center attorney], and Paul [KIWA organizer]. I thought, "Okay I need these people." So I signed up with them.

The INS agent who was in charge of our case was very confusing. It was hard to know what his real intentions were. Although he was nice and friendly to us, he was not against the idea of deporting us. This became clear when the INS tricked us. Chancee, Julie, and Paul had come to see us at the INS Terminal Island Detention Center where we were kept to eat and sleep. But when the INS found out they were coming [again] at *seven* in the morning, the INS took us to the downtown detention center at *five*. When Chancee, Julie, and Paul showed up, we weren't there. That's when I began to doubt the INS' intentions towards us and whether they were really trying to help us.

Julie, Paul, and Chancee gave us their phone numbers the first time they came to see us. A lot of us decided to give them our A numbers [alien registration number that INS assigns to every detainee] so that they would be allowed to meet with us. The INS asked each of us who we had called and a lot of people were afraid to

say anything so they didn't. When they took us down to the downtown office while Julie, Chancee, and Paul were waiting for us at the Terminal Island Detention Center, I realized that we were in the wrong place. They put us in a cell at the downtown center. Then I kept pounding on the door and telling the INS to take us all back to Terminal Island because that was where Chancee, Julie, and Paul were waiting to meet us. I told this all to the Thai interpreter working for the INS and asked them to tell the INS to bring us back.

It turns out that at the same time, Chancee, Julie, and Paul had called the INS. Steve Nutter from the garment workers union also called and threatened to call the press to see how the INS would answer their questions. They finally took us back to Terminal Island. When we saw Chancee, Paul, and Julie waiting for us there, we got so happy. My gosh! They kept us on Terminal Island for nine, almost ten days before they let us out. We kept going back and forth to the downtown center to be processed.

When we finally got out, Oh! Oh! [laughs] It was like being a group of tourists with Chancee as our guide. We could see so many new things. Wow! We got a big smile. They took us to a place to look at the stars, to the park for a barbecue, to the beach, and to Disneyland. We got free tickets to Disneyland. We went there in three buses all given for free. It was a lot of fun.

After we got out, Chancee, Julie, and Paul found us three different shelters to live in for over a month and a half. They had asked the Thai temples to take us in, but they had all refused. That's another bad story. The day that we were liberated from the detention center, some people from the Thai community invited us to a reception at a Thai temple to celebrate our freedom, but it turned into a media disaster. They had promised us they would not invite the media to the reception at the temple. But when our bus arrived the whole place was filled with press people from everywhere with their cameras. We couldn't get into the temple to worship and pay respects to Buddha at the shrine; we couldn't eat. The reporters kept pulling us to speak to the TV cameras and pushing their microphones into our faces.

It was really terrible! We asked Thai CDC to take us back to the shelters. Then we could eat and rest. Aiiii! At that time we were

afraid the owners would punish us and our families. In fact when my mother saw my face on TV in Thailand, she fainted. She did not come out of it and recover for two days because she was sick and worried.

The Thai press did us an injustice. After the big disaster at the Thai temple, we left on the school bus that took us back and forth from the shelter. Because the Thai press did not know where the bus was taking us, they reported in the Thai papers, which also reached Thailand, that we had disappeared and that no one knew where we went after we boarded the school bus. So they scared everyone [including] all our family members back home.

A little over a week after being liberated from El Monte, the telephone company donated phone cards to so we could call our families back home; we each got three minutes. After that we made collect calls. My mother was really sick after hearing the news, and she couldn't stop crying. I told her what had happened to me, everything, everything.

Now my mother is watching my children at home in Thailand. How long will I stay here? Wow! I'll stay until I am no longer afraid of being punished when I return home, as long as the safety of my family and me can be assured.

Because we had only been locked up in the factory, we didn't know anything or where anything was. I didn't know how to do this thing or that thing. [laughs] We had to learn how to shop for food, find housing, get work, everything. Chancee, Julie, and Paul took us to job interviews and helped us look for work.

The first [garment] shop I worked for after I got out was a Thai shop close to here. Now I'm working for another Thai shop with Mexican workers. The shops are small. At my first job there were about 12 or 15 people. Now it's almost 20 people where I work. It's a different shop and better than the first place. It's clean. I think the salary is okay, it's much better. At the first place I worked ten hours a day and got paid about \$180 a week after taxes. Now I work about eight or nine hours a day, sometimes half day on Saturday until about one or two o'clock. Sometimes its half and half Thai and Mexican and sometimes there are more Latino workers than Thais. The

labels we sewed in the El Monte shop were Clio, BUM, Tomato, and others. Paul has the whole list. I haven't come across any of the same labels I sewed in El Monte since I've been out.

Because of the oppression I went through I can now be very direct and assertive. It kind of forced me to express myself more, and be less tolerant of wrongs. [laughs] What I've learned from this whole experience and ordeal is a lesson that will stay with me for the rest of my life. Sometimes it hurts so much that I get numb and lose all feeling. Of course, after meeting so many caring people like the folks involved in this case, like Chancee, Julie, Paul, and the people at Thai CDC and KIWA, it really helped us to overcome the terrible things we went through. We felt like we were part of a larger family of people who really cared for us, people who loved us whom we could trust.

For example, all of them were very sensitive to our needs, fears, and concerns. They would always ask us first and never forced us to do anything. They let us make our own decisions. I believe I got stronger. In the very beginning, throughout the first year and a half every time questions like this came up from reporters or anyone else, talking about what happened always touched us emotionally and made us break down. We were always crying. We've cried so much. The fact that we're able to sit through this and not cry and have to break down kind of shows that we have become stronger. Yes, it's very rare to sit through this without crying. [laughs] Chancee would translate for eight or nine of us, like Kanit and all of our friends. First one person would start to cry, then all of us would start to cry and everybody would end up crying! Chancee and Julie would be crying too. We still see each other and some of the people live together. Chancee keeps a list of our addresses and numbers, but everyone is always moving around.

I like the Retailers Accountability Campaign [initiated by KIWA and Sweatshop Watch] because it's like an act of resistance that shows we are not willing to tolerate and accept these poor working conditions. It makes the workers' voices heard and known. It goes beyond laws that might not really have much of an impact, because people can hear directly from the workers.

We have picketed, leafleted, and visited different department stores. We try to go into the department store, meet with the management, and educate the consumers to support the boycott for accountability. We get promises from consumers not to shop at the department store again unless they change their policy. After meeting us some consumers told us they felt bad about what happened to us and promised they wouldn't go back and shop there anymore.

The garment factory owners threaten to go to Mexico to get the work done. But when they do, they have problems. When the clothes are delivered back here, there's repair work that needs to be done. They expect the local factories here to do the repair work because it wastes too much time sending it back down to Mexico. So this is just a threat.

Participating in the campaign was not scary, not after what we'd been through! Maybe others think that I am a troublemaker out to cause problems. But really, all of the workers being part of this campaign makes us feel like we are helping develop a better understanding among the general public about who we are and about working conditions in the garment industry. We are finally letting the people know about what happens to the money they spend on a piece of clothing, where that clothing came from, who made it, and how little they got paid. This campaign might help redistribute the wealth; it might help people understand that workers are not getting their fair share. We want people to know that the clothes they wear are being produced by the same kind of people as us, the workers who were slaves in El Monte.

—Los Angeles, California, March 25, 1997

- 1 From amended complaint in US District Court Central District of California case number 95-5958-ABC (BQRx), October 25, 1995:19, cited in Liebhold and Rubenstein, 1999:63.
- 2 The task force, the Apparel Industry Partnership, included UNITE, the National Consumers League, the Retail, Wholesale Department Store Union, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, as well as representatives from large manufacturers, like Liz Claiborne, Nike, Reebok, and L.L. Bean. See Ross, 1997:293. For a critique of the task force and UNITE's role within it, see Kwong, Peter, 1997:194-196.
- 3 Interview with Rojana "Na" Cheunchujit, March 25, 1997.
- 4 See Parker and Slaughter, 1994.
- 5 This was the Black Panther Party's rough translation of North Korea's "*juche*" ideology of self-reliance. See Cumings, 1997:394-433 for more on *juche*.
- 6 For example, Charles J. Kim, executive director of the Korean American Coalition in Los Angeles says that the stance some Korean restaurant owners have taken towards KIWA's organizing is "*nub juk-ko, na juk-ja*" (You die and I die)." See Kang, Connie, 1998c:A26.
- 7 Thus, CSWA exposes how employer appeals for Chinese ethnic unity against "*lofan* [outsiders] who really don't understand us" is often nothing but a fig leaf for shafting workers. At the same time the group does not let the manufacturers and retailers who benefit from the whole set up laugh themselves all the way to the bank while "Asians fight Asians" in the enclave. Similarly, the clashes between Koreatown bosses and workers have unfolded "Korean style," i.e., "in your face," "up close and personal," with both sides issuing strong moral appeals and using whatever leverage they could to bolster their positions. The emergence of first-generation immigrant workers as an organized force, supported by "20- and 30-something" Korean-American organizers with ties to outside labor and grassroots movements in other racial communities, is shaking up the class, gender, age, and racial status quo and knocking open a space for workers voices in Koreatown. See also Chinese Staff and Workers Association, 1999:5; Chinese Staff and Workers Association, 1997; Interview with JoAnn Lum, March 1, 2000; Kang, 1998c; Interview with Paul Lee, March 21, 1997; and Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates, 1999:4.
- 8 See API Force, 1997; Center for Political Education, 1999; Korean American Coalition to End Domestic Abuse, 1999; and the Labor Institute, 1994.
- 9 Committee for Asian Women, 1991; and Martens, Margaret Hosmer and Swasti Mitter (ed.), 1994.
- 10 For example, in addition to launching its innovative Justice for Janitors drive, SEIU also played the lead role in initiating the Campaign for Justice, a multi-union offensive targeting janitors, low-waged subcontracted manufacturing jobs, and service jobs in Silicon Valley, San Jose, California. The effort was spearheaded by SEIU Local 1877, and joined by HERE, Communication Workers of America, ACTWU, and the Teamsters. The

short-lived campaign provided the inspiration for the formation of the Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project (LAMAP), a multi-union, multi-employer, industry-wide, community-based organizing project that sought to organize workers in the Alameda Corridor in Los Angeles. According to immigrant labor sociologist Héctor L. Delgado, this project ran aground because "Few unions were prepared to put aside self-interest, pool resources, and act in concert with one another to develop deeper and broader ties with workers in the communities where they lived and worked." For an excellent summation of LAMAP, see Delgado, 2000: 237.

- 11 See for example, Morey, 2001; Bacon, 2000; Moody, 1996; Milkman, 2000; Acuña, 1996; and *Labor Notes*, 1998.
- 12 Martínez, Anne and Edwin García, 2001.
- 13 According to state librarian Kevin Starr, "The Hispanic nature of California has been there all along, and it was temporarily swamped between the 1880's and the 1960's, but that was an aberration. This is a reassertion of the intrinsic demographic D.N.A. of the longer pattern, which is part of the California-Mexico continuum." (Purdum, 2001.)
- 14 Greenhouse, 2001b.
- 15 For example, ILGWU, ACTWU, and later UNITE observed the organizing work of the centers and replicated what the union saw as their most successful organizing tactics. Lifting from the CSWA, La Mujer Obrera, Fuerza Unida, and AIWA models, ILGWU opened its own immigrant garment workers' centers and experimented with offering English classes and associate membership in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. ILGWU, ACTWU, and eventually UNITE, also utilized AIWA, Fuerza Unida, and KIWA's successful anti-corporate campaigns, national boycotts, and organizing among a newly awakened generation of students and youth.

The rub, however, comes when UNITE prioritizes working with the manufacturers over fighting for the rights of its members. (See the chapter on Chinese garment workers.) UNITE's stance as a business union shapes its relationship with the workers centers. The union has borrowed from the workers centers where expedient, but taken a hostile stance toward them when it feels like the workers' disputes will jeopardize its relationship with the employers. As labor historian Peter Kwong has shown, in New York's Chinatown this problem stems from the top-down manner in which the union works in partnership manufacturers to get jurisdiction over subcontractors and the workers. Kwong says that this top-down method does not require that workers also be organized from the bottom-up, it gives the union divided loyalties, and the highly centralized union "does not appreciate activism from its members." See Kwong, 1987:149-150; and Center for Economic and Social Rights, 1999:3. For coverage of UNITE's controversial use of "liquidated damages" see Henriques, 1998:B3, 1999 and 2000; and Fitch, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c & 2000. When some manufacturers pull work from union shops to send production overseas, they pay the union penalties called "liquidated damages."

- 16 For example, the immigrant workers centers in California built mutual solidarity with SEIU and HERE locals during organizing campaigns among homecare, hotel, garment, healthcare, janitorial, and restaurant workers. Additionally, other union and labor movement affiliated institutions that

specifically organize low-waged women and Asian, Pacific Islander, and Latino workers have shared cooperative relations with some of the workers' centers. 9 to 5, the National Association of Working Women, has been very supportive of a number of the women workers' centers. 9 to 5 is the nation's largest non-profit membership organization of working women which has organized low-waged workers in sex-segregated jobs to end sexual harassment and discrimination, and to win better wages, working conditions, and family-friendly policies. Some of the centers have also received solidarity from the AFL-CIO women's department, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, and the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement. Additionally a number of the workers' centers belong to the Southwest Environmental and Economic Justice Network together with workers' centers and independent unions from the northern Mexico border region.

- 17 "Presentación de los Centros de Trabajadores en Chicago" provided by María Carmen Domínguez, February 24, 1997.
- 18 See Scharlin and Villanueva, 1994; Acuña, 1988:324-330; Martínez, Elizabeth, 1998:91-99; Rose, Margaret, 1990 and 1995.
- 19 Levi's CEO Bob Haas, who is the great-great-grandnephew of the company's founder, started out life with an inheritance of some \$10 million. Haas emerged as the company's chief executive in 1984, presiding over the closure of Levi's plants across the United States, outsourcing of production overseas, and massive layoffs, including in San Antonio where workers were dumped just as the company scored record-making profits. During Haas' tenure stock prices rose from \$2.53 to \$265 a share, a 105-fold increase, by 1995. In 1996, after a leveraged buyout of \$4.3 billion, the company added \$3.3 billion to the corporate debt, for which the Levi's workers paid dearly, despite record sales that year of \$7.1 billion. With the buyout, Haas transferred and further concentrated control and wealth to a 4-man voting trust: himself, his uncle Peter Haas, Sr., cousin Peter Haas Jr., and a distant relative, Warren Hellman, who is a partner in Hellmann & Friedman, a San Francisco investment banking firm. Haas family members owned 95 percent of the company stock and Bob Haas' personal stake in the company was estimated to be worth more than \$900 million in 1997, the year that the company began once again to downsize thousands of its U.S. workers. See Sherman, 1997 and Stehle, 1998.
- 20 Johnston, 1997.
- 21 Baca, 1997.
- 22 18,500 jobs were lost at 28 US and one Canadian plant. The company also closed one French and three Belgian plants. Emert, 1999; Colliver, 2000; Schoenberger, 2000; Associated Press, 1998b; Frost, 1998.
- 23 Zoll, 1998.
- 24 Interviews with Ruben Sólis, April 5, 2000 and Pamela Chiang, April 14, 2001. Union members were pressured to break off support for Fuerza Unida in 1994, but they re-joined the women in protesting Levi's firings of workers during the 1997-1999 layoffs.
- 25 *San Francisco Examiner*, 1994.

- 26 *Labor Notes*, 1998:2.
- 27 Tanaka, 1997a and 1997b; King, 1998; Associated Press, 1998a.
- 28 Interview with Viola Casares, May 3, 2001. Sweatshop Watch, 2001.
- 29 *La Mujer Obrera*, 1990, 1991, 1996b; and Márquez, 1995.
- 30 Kever, 1990.
- 31 Blumenberg and Ong, 1994:313-316.
- 32 Testimony of Domingo González, Texas Center for Policy Studies, in *Asian Immigrant Women Advocates*, 1995a:18-19.
- 33 Louie, Miriam, 1996.
- 34 US Department of Labor, 1996: 96-108.
- 35 See Delloro, 2000.
- 36 See note 15 above.
- 37 Interview with Paul Lee, March 21, 1997.
- 38 Sweatshop Watch and Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates, 1996.
- 39 Interviews with Paul Lee, March 21, 1997, Rojana "Na" Cheunchujit, March 25, 1997, and Chanchanit Martorell, March 25, 1997. See also Su, 1997.
- 40 See Sweatshop Watch, 1999:2; Su, 1997; Liebhold and Rubenstein, 1999.
- 41 See Sweatshop Watch, 1999:1-2.
- 42 National Mobilization Against Sweatshops, 1999. Interview with Nancy Eng, April 13, 2001.
- 43 Interview with Nancy Eng, April 13, 2001.
- 44 Although some 60 percent of its annual revenues are earned through sales in the United States, Donna Karan contracted close to 60 percent of its production to Asian facilities, 20 percent to European, and about 20 to 22 percent to US contractors, using between 440 to 500 contractors worldwide. See Donna Karan International, *Annual Reports*, 1997-1998, cited in Center for Economic and Social Rights, 1999:11.
- 45 For more on the race and class blinders within sections of the anti-corporate movement see Elizabeth Martínez's much-read and discussed piece, "Where Was the Color in Seattle? Looking for reasons why the Great Battle was so white." 2000. See also how a large proportion of company layoffs takes place overseas, Leonhardt, 2001. For critical views from movements in the global South about proposals from those in the North, see Raghavan, no date; and Khor, 2000. For a critique of corporate codes of conduct by workers' organizations in Asia and Latin America, see Shepherd, no date; and Jeffcott and Yanz, 1998.
- 46 For examples of worker- and community-based codes of accountability see the principles developed at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991; Working Group Meeting on Trade and Globalization, 1996.
- 47 See Sweatshop Watch, "Frequently Asked Questions."
- 48 Interview with Chanchanit Martorell, March 25, 1997; Martorell, 1994.
- 49 Interview with Jay Mendoza, March 27, 1997.