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## The Power and Promise of **Community Unionism**

■ *Andy Banks*

"I didn't like unions very much. To me, they were just a bunch of suits talking to other suits," says Jono Shaffer, one of the growing number of community organizers who now work for unions.

It had long been Shaffer's ambition to help organize California's burgeoning immigrant population. Ironically, his first opportunity came when a union asked him to help organize immigrant workers. This led to a job with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) working on their Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign. His primary assignment was to get community groups to support SEIU's efforts to unionize Los Angeles' large nonunion building services industry.

In organizing this mostly Latino immigrant workforce, Shaffer and the other JfJ organizers broke almost all the rules of traditional union organizing. Consequently, the union itself has been transformed into a hybrid organization—part union and part community group.

"This is difficult to explain, but the community groups we work with don't feel they are merely supporting our fight for a union. It's more blended than that," explains Shaffer, "A big problem com-

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munity organizations have is identifying and getting to their enemy. Too often they are stuck with complaining to City Hall. But City Hall is rarely the root cause of the community's problems. It's corporate power that's at the heart of what community organizations are always fighting—bad employers, developers, bankers. These are the enemies. The Justice for Janitors campaign acts as a catalyst for community groups and helps them attack the source of their problems directly.'

Shaffer's statement portrays an emerging vision of union organizing that represents a dramatic departure from the way most unions have been organizing workers for the past 40 years. Borrowing from the citywide structures of the Knights of Labor in the 19th century, a new breed of union organizers is experimenting with a brand of unionism that may ultimately recast labor as a community-wide movement which tackles workplace issues.

Unlike the now defunct Knights, these modern-day champions of community-based union organizing maintain close ties with unions across the country through their affiliation with resource-rich national unions. Many believe that this mixture of community organizing with national union support will spawn a new wave of union growth.

### **ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY UNIONISM**

A definite pattern of community unionism has emerged from a potpourri of new experiences. Though organizers know that no two organizing drives or communities are the same, there are several elements that seem to be present even under very different circumstances.

*The cornerstone of community unionism is that important nonlabor groups in the community have some sort of ownership of the unionization effort.* This means that extraordinary efforts are made to involve community leaders in the planning stages and all subsequent activities. It is essential that these leaders, and the people they represent, recognize community unionism as an important means towards winning their own fights.

The community organizations targeted for involvement are not the community service organizations that labor traditionally supports—the United Way, the Red Cross and Scouting programs. Instead, organizers focus on involving advocacy groups such as civil rights and minority rights groups, progressive church organizations, environmental groups, women's rights and senior citizen organizations. Community unionist organizers understand that success will depend on their ability to demonstrate that there are "good guys"

and "bad guys" in the community. They must convince other groups that they are all fighting the same bad guys and that it makes more sense to fight them together.

*The second important element found in community unionism is the active involvement of union and nonunion workers in organizing.* Nonunion workers involved in organizing their co-workers gain confidence and feel less isolated when they organize shoulder-to-shoulder with their already unionized sisters and brothers. This also revitalizes local unions by activating their rank and file members and providing more opportunities for members to take on leadership roles.

Many unions are having difficulties recruiting leaders which represent the same ethnic and gender backgrounds of the new workforce. Involvement of women, minority and immigrant members in organizing campaigns allows unions to develop a more diversified and representative leadership group. This diversified group of new leaders will be more readily accepted by important community organizations which represent the interests of women, minorities and immigrants. Involving members in organizing campaigns also assures that these potential leaders are cultivated under conditions which emphasize an *organizing model* rather than a *servicing model* of unionism.

*A third characteristic of community unionism is a belief that unions should not be defined by the narrow provisions of the National Labor Relations Act or, in the case of public employees, state labor relations laws.* Community unionists believe that the election and certification provisions of the NLRA too often prevent unions from organizing. They maintain the sole standard for judging union status is whether or not the employer will deal with you. Community unionists contend that employers will accept unions only when they understand they'll be hurt if they don't.

This doesn't mean that community unionists fail to take advantage of the law. In fact, community unionism tends to incorporate very aggressive legal strategies. It simply means that from the beginning of a campaign the objective is employer acquiescence to the union, rather than NLRB certification.

*The fourth element of community unionism deals with the critical but often overlooked area of campaign resources and how they are allocated.* In traditional union organizing, unions place organizers at a worksite to collect enough signatures to petition the NLRB for a certification election. Though employers may use legalistic delaying tactics, the entire process usually takes about a year. The decision for the union becomes whether or not the potential win is worth the predictable expenses. If the union wins, the

payback begins immediately after certification or when the first contract is negotiated.

Community unionism requires a much greater up front commitment of resources. Because the community is being organized long before any specific employer is targeted, four and five year campaigns can be commonplace. This requires an adequate source of funds and talent (usually a large national union) and an incredible amount of patience and risk-taking. This is no easy task. National union organizing directors are under constant pressure to quickly produce big numbers to justify their annual budgets.

Community unionists also feel it is important to develop local sources of talent and money. This is important because there is rarely enough, even from the largest union. But, equally important, community allies will not develop a sense of ownership of the campaign if the community is not responsible for providing some of the financial support and staffing.

*A fifth feature of community unionism is its efforts at finding ways to involve other unions who may have no direct immediate self-interest in the particular campaign being waged.* Community unionists are developing new ways to attract the support of other unions. Facilitating this effort is a new sense of solidarity in the labor movement. It is becoming all too apparent that no one union can win it alone anymore.

*The final and most distinctive aspect of community unionism is an overall strategic realization that campaigns must be waged in the court of public opinion.* Here's where community unionists borrow most heavily from the methods of community organizers.

All activity is designed either to increase public support or to get the targeted employer to overreact, thus increasing public sympathy. This means that the organizing takes on a moral imperative—that the campaign embodies the crusading zeal common to most popular movements.

The tactics used by community unionists reflect this very public and moral posture. They tend to be militant, nonviolent and focused on mobilizing large numbers of supporters to stage public disruptions, conduct consumer boycotts, and take advantage of government regulations. Tactics start out mild and escalate in intensity as the campaign gains strength. This strategy appeals to supporters' imagination, and it throws opponents off balance, constantly worrying them about what will happen next.

This grassroots tactical approach requires that the union spend significant time on public and membership education. It is vital that strategic research be conducted, enabling the union to be viewed as authoritative and credible to members and the public.

And from the beginning, community unionists must have a comprehensive media strategy to help sustain the campaign's prominence in the public eye.

It is one thing to talk about "principles" of community unionism but in the real and unpredictable world of union organizing, a surprising number of unionists are putting these principles into practice. Los Angeles Justice for Janitors is such a case.

### **THE LOS ANGELES JUSTICE FOR JANITORS CAMPAIGN**

"The Justice for Janitors campaign is driven by an understanding of the building services industry," recounts Steve Lerner, organizing director of SEIU's Building Services Division. "The most important thing to understand about this industry is that, in most cases, janitors do not technically work for the owners or managers of the buildings they clean."

Indeed, the building services industry has changed dramatically in the past 20 years. Where janitors were once employed full-time by building owners and enjoyed some fringe benefits, now they are more likely to be employed part-time by contractors who pay minimum wage and no benefits. These contractors bid against other contractors who also pay low wages. Even when a union is successful in getting all the janitors of a single contractor to vote for the union, all a building manager has to do is put out a new bid and bring in a different low-wage nonunion contractor. "In Justice for Janitors we are trying a different approach," says Lerner. "We organize all the janitors in a particular market at once. This gives building managers no choice but to hire union contractors who pay decent wages and benefits."



**"Justice for Janitors made a conscious effort to reach out to those of us working for the immigrant community. In the process we found out that what they stand for overlaps with our concerns. It's all about creating a social movement."**

**—Miki Fujimoto  
Lawyer, Friends of Justice for Janitors**

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After successes in Pennsylvania, Denver and Seattle, SEIU decided to tackle the huge nonunion building services industry in Los Angeles. SEIU Local 399 there was originally organized to represent full-time janitors who worked directly for building

owners. But due to the industry's restructuring, by 1986 the union share in downtown L.A. had shrunk to 30% and was even smaller in other areas of Los Angeles.

To combat this decline, Local 399 gave JfJ organizers a free hand to run a pilot project in the downtown market. The initial staff consisted of two organizers, a servicing representative and a researcher. Their priorities were to develop a complete understanding of the building services industry in the downtown area, to build a working relationship with the local media, and to create a close rapport with community groups—especially those serving the immigrant Latino population.

While this work was going on, JfJ helped Local 399 totally reorganize the way it dealt with its members in the downtown area. They created a stewards council and held regular jobsite meetings for the members. An intensive education program focused on the threat of the nonunion competition. JfJ organizers made it clear to Local 399 members that in the face of industry restructuring, the only way they could expect to hang on to union scale jobs was to help organize the nonunion janitors at the building next door. They also stressed the importance of receiving community support. Very early in the campaign, JfJ sent Local 399 members to support the activities of various community groups.

In the next phase of the campaign JfJ organizers and union members, sometimes accompanied by members of community organizations, approached nonunion janitors on the job and at home. Organizers used these one-on-one encounters with nonunion janitors to document employer violations of wage-and-hour laws and state safety-and-health standards. JfJ used these issues to gain credibility with the media and to encourage delegations of workers to confront their supervisors and building managers over the violations. The janitors were also asked to sign cards authorizing Local 399 to bargain a contract for them. Some of these worker activists were hired as JfJ organizers.

If management retaliated against outspoken employees the union often declared an unfair labor practice (ULP) strike and filed charges against the company with the NLRB, the Labor Department and CALOSHA. JfJ organizers knew they could never prevent the company from hiring replacement workers. Instead, they focused on making it difficult to conduct business as usual. Large crowds of community activists, union janitors, members of other unions and striking workers leafletted and held rallies and sit-ins at the targeted buildings. This activity and mounting legal expenses created huge incentives for the companies to go union.

A group of community activists became so attracted to the JfJ cause, they formed a totally independent group, Friends of Justice for Janitors. Unlike typical labor auxiliary or support groups, Friends ran its own meetings, did its own fundraising and conducted its own activities to help the janitors.

Delegations of community leaders visited building managers and major tenants. When the courts enjoined the union from picketing or handbilling, Friends took on these activities themselves. Immigration rights activist Miki Fujimoto, an initiator of Friends and a member of the L.A. Lawyers Guild, organized support from attorneys to pressure the huge law firm O'Melveny & Meyers to use a union contractor in its downtown building. A well publicized mock trial found O'Melveny guilty of abusing its janitors. The law firm's recruiters were leafleted at the University of Southern California and Harvard Law School. Eventually, the company relented and agreed to use a union contractor. Says Fujimoto about her commitment to the campaign, "Justice for Janitors made a conscious effort to reach out to those of us working for the immigrant community. In the process we found out that what they stand for overlaps with our concerns. It's all about creating a social movement."

Similar mass actions and mounting public pressure became too much for the downtown contractors to deal with. As Justice for Janitors gained strength in downtown L.A., SEIU spread the campaign to the Century City section of town. Century City has modern buildings whose tenants include many of the professional firms and agencies working in the highly visible L.A. entertainment industry. It would be an understatement to say these tenants are very image conscious.

Knowing this, JfJ organizers adjusted their strategy accordingly. They ran a full-page advertisement in the entertainment industry newspaper, *Variety*. Part of the ad was a photo of burly striking coal miners being arrested with the caption "Remember Pittston." Next to this was a photo of Century City janitors being trained in civil disobedience. Justice for Janitors targeted Century City because a major international building services company, ISS, had just bought out some smaller Century City-based contractors to gain entry to the L.A. market. The union focused on ISS by calling a strike of its employees in the summer of 1990. Workers and hundreds of supporters held lunchtime rallies and flooded the swanky Century City lounges during "happy hour," ordering sodas and eating freely at the lush complimentary buffets. These actions meant the tenants, who saw themselves as the "beautiful people" of L.A., were confronted daily about the abuse of the invisible

workforce that cleans their offices at night.

Justice for Janitors reached out for help from unions in other cities by sending roving pickets of L.A. janitors to other ISS facilities. Other union locals honored the JfJ pickets, even when they enjoyed union contracts with ISS. SEIU picketed ISS headquarters in Denmark, and the New York SEIU local pledged a walkout of their 5,000 members at ISS locations if the Los Angeles janitors put up picket lines.

The Century City campaign reached its peak in the summer of 1990, after L.A. police viciously attacked a peaceful march by 300 janitors and their supporters. Thirty-eight of the wounded marchers were arrested. One, a community supporter who was pregnant, miscarried her baby as a result of the police beating.

Juan Jose Gutierrez is Executive Director of One Stop, a state-wide advocate and service agency for immigrants. His organization organized a fundraiser for JfJ and recruited its supporters for the Century City march. Though still shaken by memories of the police brutality, he is particularly proud that half of those arrested were One Stop recruits. He remembers, "My view changed that day. It became clear that organized labor has serious problems with the institutions of government—the police—being actively opposed to unions. I knew then that we had to do everything we could to make Justice for Janitors successful." Gutierrez also concedes that the campaign has helped his organization, "Because of One Stop's very visible role, our constituency sees us as a responsible organization—not one that's going to turn away from bottomline conflicts."

It took five years, but the Justice for Janitors campaign was victorious, bringing in 5,000 new members and organizing 90% of the building services market in downtown L.A. and Century City. Janitors wages went from \$4.25 to \$6.80 per hour and from no health insurance to full family coverage.

JfJ is now targeting other L.A. area markets which employ thousands of other janitors, and has started Justice for Janitors campaigns in other parts of the state. At these new locations, JfJ's earlier community organizing in Los Angeles is still paying off. One Stop has 110 offices throughout California, and every week it holds "Workers Fridays" to deal with immigrants work-related problems. Because of One Stop's experience with Justice for Janitors, Gutierrez says that "now when people come and tell us there is an effort to unionize their job and ask us what they should do, we tell them: 'Don't just support the union. That won't empower you. Play a prominent role in bringing the union in—like we've done for the janitors.'"



Justice for Janitors at Century City, Los Angeles had the active support of community groups. (Photo by Bob Riha, Jr.)

### WHAT IS A UNION MEMBER?

Justice for Janitors organizers are not alone in experimenting with community unionism. A growing number of community unionists are even starting to question some long held assumptions about the very definition of union membership. This group holds that it is a mistake for labor to offer membership only to those workers covered by a union contract. They point to polls which consistently show that at least 45% of all workers desire union representation.

"Why not let these folks join the labor movement now?" asks labor organizer Teresa Conrow, "The number one reason only 12% of the private sector workforce is unionized is because we force workers to jump NLRB hurdles and to survive vicious employer campaigns before we even allow them to join a union."

The AFL-CIO Union Privilege Benefit Program (UPBP) represents an early attempt at noncontract recruiting in the labor movement. Through UPBP, unions offer "associate membership" to workers who are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement. As associate members they receive low-cost and discount services such as credit cards and legal programs. Though workers have not rushed into unions to become associate members, the program

has been a useful adjunct for some unions trying their hand at noncontract organizing.

The national AFL-CIO's most aggressive application of the associate member concept is the California Immigrant Workers Association (CIWA). For \$20 a year immigrants who join CIWA receive legal assistance on immigration matters, classes to help gain permanent residence status, some vocation training and the regular package of UPBP benefits. Some 3,000 immigrants have joined CIWA, and several successful union organizing drives have been developed from CIWA contacts.

CIWA aside, noncontract organizers have found that, alone, associate member programs are too passive an approach. They realized it would take more than discounts and services to attract new members. The real draw would be finding ways to protect workers without the promise of union contracts, grievance procedures and arbitration clauses.

The Communications Workers of America (CWA) has gone beyond most other unions in applying community unionism to noncontract organizing. In Mississippi, Oklahoma and Texas (all states with no bargaining law for public employees), CWA has formed unions for state workers. Members pay dues and participate in the activities of the union. By mobilizing state employees and creating alliances with other unions and citizens groups, CWA has publicly pressured lawmakers for concessions and won some important gains. CWA leaders hope someday these workers will have collective bargaining but, in the interim, they aren't going to be denied the right to union membership and protection.

In northern California, CWA went one step further in applying community unionism to noncontract organizing by establishing the Association for Workplace Justice (AWJ). AWJ is an associate member organization that brings some of the benefits and protection of union membership to workers without regard to their employer, occupation, or industry. Organizers help members prepare and file charges against employers for violations of health and safety standards, wage and hour laws, and anti-discrimination statutes. They mobilize member and community support behind workers fighting abuse on the job. Its members include both low-wage and professional workers from as unlikely places as the anti-union Silicon Valley electronics industry. In San Francisco, AWJ is organizing taxicab drivers who have been denied coverage under the NLRA.

AWJ has been particularly successful responding to workers' complaints of sexual harassment and sex and race discrimination. AWJ assisted Vietnamese workers at Northern Telecom when a

supervisor prohibited workers from speaking in their native language. By mobilizing other Vietnamese workers at Northern Telecom and working closely with a local Asian legal rights group, AWJ forced the company to apologize and to withdraw disciplinary warnings from those workers charged with violating the language ban. AWJ also joined with the local NAACP to fight against discrimination against black workers at a Hewlett-Packard facility.

On two occasions AWJ helped members connect with other unions and gain union recognition from their employers. Now AWJ is concentrating on organizing workers at Northern Telecom with the long-term goal of gaining bargaining rights with CWA.

Former AWJ organizer Mike Eisenscher believes in AWJ's community unionist approach, but feels it's a big task for one union to sponsor. He feels organizations such as AWJ could accomplish much more if they had the active backing of all unions in the area. Eisenscher argues "AWJ gives labor flexibility and opens up a whole range of new tactics for unions. AWJ's not restricted by the traditional collective bargaining model. The members of AWJ know its not just another union chasing their dues."

## **JOBS WITH JUSTICE**

It would be a mistake to assume that community unionism is useful only for unions who are interested in gaining new members. In 1987, when ten national unions came together and formed Jobs with Justice (JwJ), they had an expanded purpose in mind. Though organizing new members was a priority, JwJ was also created to engage in other types of workplace struggles. In its four years of existence Jobs with Justice has become the labor movement's most ambitious and comprehensive attempt at community unionism.

On June 23, 1987 3,000 members of the Eastern Airlines Machinists union donned red t-shirts and picketed Eastern's headquarters at the Miami airport. Joining this sea of red were over 500 representatives from other unions and community groups. This first Jobs with Justice event was sponsored by 80 Florida unions and 23 community groups representing women, minorities, consumers, senior citizens and the religious community.

Organizers announced the purpose of the demonstration was to bring public attention to the problem of worker abuse in Florida and to encourage all like-minded Floridians to attend a Jobs with Justice rally in Miami Beach on July 29. For the next month JwJ activities dominated the South Florida media. The July rally was a huge success, attended by 12,000 supporters and attracting national attention to the plight of Eastern workers under their boss

After Miami, Jobs with Justice committees sprang up in communities across the country but mostly in the Sunbelt and areas not considered labor strongholds. Within a year, 60 more Jobs with Justice rallies were organized, involving over 100,000 people. From the beginning, national planners of JwJ intended to create a decentralized movement controlled by local people. What makes Jobs with Justice different than local labor councils is the fact that membership is not limited to area union leaders, but open to rank-and-file union members and labor's community allies. Jobs with Justice also tends to be more militant and emphasizes mass mobilization and direct action.

For example, Colorado Jobs with Justice was formed in 1988 to help the victims of publishing industry corporate raider, Dean Singleton. Singleton had purchased the *Denver Post* and was planning to pay for the takeover by forcing wage concessions from the workforce. The 100 mailers at the *Post*, members of CWA, were without a contract when Singleton cut their wages by 52% and refused to negotiate a new agreement. The outraged workers knew Singleton wanted them to strike so that they could be permanently replaced. Instead, CWA put out a call to other unions, asking them to form a local chapter of JwJ to help the mailers and any other group of workers who faced similar problems.

This brought a strong response from a number of unions and progressive community organizations. The original members of Colorado JwJ included CWA, the Newspaper Guild, the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers, the Mine Workers, and SEIU. The Colorado Council of Churches, National Organization of Women, Colorado Council of Senior Citizens, Citizen Action, National Lawyers Guild, Rainbow Coalition, Denver Urban Ministries, and the Community Resource Center also joined.

Jobs with Justice agreed to take on Singleton until the mailers received justice. CWA's national office provided substantial resources in the form of money and technical expertise, and CWA Local 7777, representing telephone company workers, devoted a staff member half-time to act as the JwJ coordinator.

The coalition threw everything it could think of at Singleton. Radio commercials appealed to Colorado citizens' sense of fair play and voiced concern over outsiders who could swoop in overnight and reduce the community's standard of living. JwJ harassment techniques got the *Post* knocked from its sponsorship of the International Ski Championships. On almost a weekly basis Colorado JwJ sponsored rallies and marches which attracted as many as a thousand supporters. Activists were even sent to picket Singleton's home in a wealthy Houston, Texas, suburb. There they

were joined by the newly-formed Houston JwJ.

One of the most effective tactics employed by JwJ was a subscriber boycott of the *Denver Post*. Every evening JwJ phone bank volunteers called subscribers and helped them cancel their subscriptions. In all, the *Post* lost 30,000 subscribers. The pressure came from all directions and became so great that Singleton decided to settle with the mailers.

With the mailers' problem resolved, JwJ members turned their attention to the plight of nonunion janitors in Denver where SEIU had been actively organizing. JwJ helped by mass-picketing and occupying the lobbies of office buildings. JwJ leaders were elevated to the status of local martyrs when they were arrested for entering an office building in an attempt to talk to tenants. This brought a tremendous amount of attention to the abuse of struggling janitors, and the greed and insensitivity of the building owners.

The U.S. Mint in Denver also refused to hire union janitors. JwJ activists converged upon long lines of summer tourists waiting to visit the Mint and explained the janitors case. It wasn't long before the Mint's management found enough money to hire union janitors.

By now, Colorado Jobs with Justice was active in a multitude of workplace struggles on a weekly basis and had become a powerful voice for workers' concerns. It was a common sight at lunch-time to see hundreds of chanting JwJ marchers snake through downtown Denver streets, stopping at targeted worksites to condemn abusive employers and to pick up more supporters.

In March 1989, JwJ worked with Eastern Airline strikers against Eastern owner Frank Lorenzo's attempt to use his other airline, Continental, to break the Eastern strike. At the Machinists' request, Colorado JwJ started organizing for a mass demonstration at Continental's Denver terminal. A local AFL-CIO official condemned the event as too militant and staged an alternate rally at the same time but a mile away from the terminal. This open split divided the labor movement, and labor was never able to mount significant pressure on Continental's key Denver operations. The active resistance to Jobs with Justice by this labor official had a long-lasting negative effect. Only recently has Colorado JwJ been able to rebuild around the fight for universal health care coverage.

It is not clear if national Jobs with Justice will continue to emphasize the building of strong local organizations. At the 1991 national meeting of JwJ, attended by 200 enthusiastic labor and community activists from all over the U.S., some felt JwJ should change from being a source of community unionism and instead become a national mobilization network supporting such important issues as universal health care.

On June 6, 1991 Jobs with Justice held its Health Care Action Day in over 200 cities and at thousands of worksites in every state. Tens of thousands of JwJ demonstrators attended militant actions at the offices of health insurers. No one can disagree that the labor movement needs an effective national mobilization capability such as this. But the successes shown by Colorado JwJ and similar JwJ groups in Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Tennessee, and Texas make it imperative that JwJ's national leadership not abandon JwJ's pioneering efforts at bottom-up community unionism. The problems of scarce local resources and resistance from some labor officials are not too great to overcome. The real challenge is if our national union leadership is willing to risk relinquishing some of its control to a decentralized structure that shares decision-making with nonlabor groups. Some would argue that labor's real risk lies in not embracing this community unionism.

### **CONCLUSION**

Community unionism tends to take on two forms. Justice for Janitors focuses on getting community groups involved with union efforts to gain a contract or win employer recognition for a particular group of workers. This community coalition-building has allowed unions such as SEIU to garner broad support for a particular labor struggle.

CWA's Association for Workplace Justice in California and Colorado Jobs with Justice are examples of the second form of community unionism. Rather than organizing community support for union campaigns, both AWJ and JwJ exist as separate community organizations that take on workplace issues. This workplace-based community organizing seeks to enable all workers within a community to join and participate in the labor movement, even if their employer is never likely to recognize a union or sign a collective bargaining agreement.

Workplace-based community organizing is different from the coalition-building of Justice for Janitors. The Jobs with Justice model actually changes the very definition of what unions are. Instead of being organizations representing workers at particular facilities of particular employers, unions are transformed into a community-wide movement that organizes around workplace related issues of economic justice and worker abuse.

These two forms of community unionism are not mutually exclusive. They seem to work best when used in tandem. A union seeking to organize a specific group of workers will be greatly enhanced if it can get help from an existing community organiza-

tion dedicated to fighting worker abuse. Having a community organization such as Jobs with Justice already intact means each union in an area will not have to organize community support from scratch, as the janitors in Los Angeles had to do.

Likewise, a union-sponsored community group which organizes around workplace issues will find the best way to eliminate worker abuse is through union recognition and strong collective bargaining agreements. When these organizations support union efforts to bring collective bargaining to nonunion workers or win contracts for union workers, their agenda becomes more focused, they find more resources are available, and the coalition's members become more energized.

To demonstrate to workers that power can be found in numbers, both strains of community unionism employ the militant, non-violent direct action tactics of community organizing. They increase labor's numbers by opening membership to nonunion workers and by ensuring the full participation of community allies.

Ironically, there is evidence that Jobs with Justice's national mobilization strategy depends on reclaiming labor's roots through the building of a strong community unionism. Take, for example, the June 6 JwJ Health Care Action Day activities in Los Angeles. Over 700 demonstrators stormed the L.A. offices of the Equitable Insurance Co. to publicly vent their anger over the insurance industry's duplicitous actions in the fight for universal health care.

This was the first action of the newly formed L.A. Jobs with Justice which attracted the support of 34 unions and community groups. Its co-coordinator was Jono Shaffer, the Justice for Janitors organizer. Shaffer was clearly excited by JwJ and its potential: "People are serious about making it a success. Jobs with Justice has the potential of becoming this community's focal point for economic justice organizing."

When their occupation of Equitable was over, JwJ demonstrators marched to a nearby Hyatt to protest the hotel's recent cut in workers' health benefits and Hyatt's multi-year effort to bust the hotel workers' union. After Shaffer related this story to me I commented that adding the local action at the hotel to the Health Care Action Day events seemed to be good strategy. True to his community organizer instincts, Shaffer responded incredulously: "What would be the purpose in participating in Health Care Action Day if there wasn't a local organizing component like Hyatt?"

Clearly, the only way labor can sustain a national mobilization for economic justice is by developing the capability to organize communities around local workplace struggles. That's the power and promise of community unionism. ■