

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Michael Omi, "New Wave Immigration," *Socialist Review* (November-December, 1981), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>The conservative estimate of undocumented workers in the United States in 1978 was 3.5 million. Former INS Commissioner Leonel J. Castillo has placed the annual net increase at 1 million. Projecting his estimate, there were over 6 million undocumented workers in the United States as of the end of 1981. Other well-informed sources estimate the number to be as high as 10 million. See Chaikin and Comstock, "Toward a Rational Immigration Policy," *The Journal*, The Institute for Socioeconomic Studies (Spring, 1982).

<sup>3</sup>The concept of "superexploitation," developed by Jaime Osorio Urbina in "Superexploitation y Clase Obrera: El Caso Mexicano" in *Cuadernos Politicos* (October, 1975), was cited in André Gumder Frank's *Crisis: In the Third World* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981). However, the general theoretical framework for this article is elucidated in a 1982 issue of *Contemporary Marxism* (no. 5), subtitled "The New Nomads." Particularly important were the articles by Cockcraft, "Mexican Migration, Crisis, and the Internationalization of Labor Struggle"; Alvarez, "Economic Crisis and Migration"; and Dixon et al., "Reindustrialization and the Transnational Labor Force in the U.S. Today."

<sup>4</sup>Sol C. Chaikin and Phil Comstock, "Toward a Rational Immigration Policy," *The Journal*, The Institute for Socioeconomic Studies (Spring, 1982), p. 51.

<sup>5</sup>"Through the Revolving Door," *Dollars and Sense* (January, 1983), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>Cited in "Mexican Migration, Crisis, and Labor Struggle," Cockcraft in *Contemporary Marxism*, no. 5 (1982), p. 57.

<sup>7</sup>*Dollars and Sense*, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>Cited in Joseph Mulligan's "Slave Labor in the Cane Fields," *The Progressive* (May, 1981), p. 32.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup>*Noticiero*, Journal of California Rural Legal Assistance (September, 1982), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Peter Schey, "The Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy: Evading the Interface between U.S. Immigration and U.S. Capital," National Center for Immigrants' Rights.

<sup>12</sup>Jeff House, "Scapegoating," *FUSE* (January-February, 1983), p. 261.

<sup>13</sup>"Plight of the H-2 Nurse," in *Karapatan*, Newsletter of the National Filipino Immigrant Rights Organization (March-April, 1981), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup>Jesus Romo, "Migration and Economic Development of Communal Lands in Mexico," 1982, unpublished.

# San Francisco

by Mike Miller

Organizers know that the sustaining sources of human energy in the building of powerful people's organizations are anger at injustice that is rooted in personal experience and a desire to do something about it, experiences of solidarity or community that come from common action, and consciousness of a personal significance associated with participation in something bigger than oneself.

"Community organizing," as we define it, is about strengthening the capacity of "average" people to defend and advance their interests. It is guided by the values of the democratic tradition—and those of the teachings of the world's great religions. To realize fully its power to achieve this purpose, such organizing must address workplace, neighborhood, family, and place of worship, for these are the central places where our humanity can blossom and where it is today under attack.

## AN ORGANIZATION OF ORGANIZATIONS

In 1968, in San Francisco's Mission District, there emerged a powerful organization called the Mission Coalition Organization (MCO). It was broad-based, democratic, multiracial, ethnic, and multi-issue. Among the 60 or so members of MCO were local

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unions of painters, longshoremen, carpenters, laborers, and teachers. The union that participated most actively was the San Francisco Federation of Teachers (AFT). The leaders of that local became key leaders in the planning, housing, and education committees of MCO. Teachers "turned out" for major actions of the organization.

In 1968, prior to AFT membership in MCO, and at a time of militant student activity on local campuses, a third-world student campaign for 15 non-negotiable demands emerged at the local high school. After serious internal discussion in MCO, the AFT was approached on the issue. The union was treated as the legitimate voice of teachers since a majority of teachers in the school were members. The AFT president and several of his associates met with MCO leaders. An alliance was agreed upon. Through AFT involvement with MCO, teachers at the school began to see that there were ways to relate to parents and the community around the school directly, rather than relying on the traditional method of dealing through school site administration. This break from tradition was met with some initial skepticism, which was in turn fanned by the site administrators. MCO successfully pressed for the transfer of the top administration at the school, and a more responsive one was installed. At MCO's second annual convention, among the 900 delegates and alternates from the religious, eth-

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nic, youth, senior, homeowner, tenant, small business, and labor organizations, was an 18-member delegation from AFT Local 61.

In 1968, the AFT went on strike. The issues were primarily noneconomic, with many of them having to do with the quality of education. While supported by organized labor, almost every neighborhood group in San Francisco was either silent on or opposed to the strike, except for MCO. The MCO statement of strike support was reprinted on 50,000 flyers distributed by the teachers union in San Francisco. As important as the message communicated on the flyer was the morale generated among teachers when a powerful community organization said, "We are in common struggle with you as you have been in common struggle with us."

The MCO-AFT joint activities accomplished two things. First, they humanized each other by developing ongoing personal relationships in the framework of a multi-issue action organization. Second, the two organizations decided that whatever seemed to divide them, they would seek to resolve these divisions by themselves, rather than in the forum of the Board of Education's public hearings. It should be noted that this took place at the time when community control fights were breaking out in school districts all across the country, with resulting bitter polarization between teachers and minority community organizations.

The lessons to be drawn are numerous, but there are three that are particularly significant: (1) because the experience of the beneficiaries of public services is with their immediate providers, the potential for division between lower-level employees and beneficiaries is great; (2) conscious efforts to overcome this division can be undertaken by either union or community organizations; (3) politicians and bureaucrats will try to frustrate such efforts at unity since their own power is, or might be, jeopardized by them.

## A MAJOR CAMPAIGN

In 1974 and 1975 a major campaign was undertaken in California to halt and reverse skyrocketing utility costs. Electricity and Gas for People (E&GP) sought to turn Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) around. The focus of the campaign became an effort to win lifeline utility rates\* in the state legislature and public-utilities commission. The initiators of the campaign were a group of neighborhood, church, liberal, environmental, and other leaders and activists. Some had a base; some didn't. A majority of them was specifically committed to an alliance with organized labor.

The E&GP campaign did not take an "antigrowth" approach. Such a position is anathema to working people and their unions. It means, especially in a period of unemployment, that there will not be job opportunities. Further, E&GP said that rate hikes should take into account "needed construction." What was "needed" was left unspecified, to be negotiated later. But in the initial platform respect was paid to the legitimate concern of the unions for jobs, and trade union leaders participated in drafting the platform language.

In addition, E&GP specifically checked with the union of jurisdiction—in this case a local of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) AFL-CIO—to let them know what the campaign was about and that it would be responsive to their concerns. This touching of bases became particularly important when PG&E

\*Lifeline utility rates provide for basic amounts of gas and electricity at the lowest per unit price.

subsequently told its employees that if it didn't get what it wanted they wouldn't get an increase in wages and salaries. With IBEW neutrality, and with the general understanding that the campaign wasn't out to screw workers, it became much easier to obtain the direct support of traditionally liberal unions as well as those with low- or moderate-income members. (The State Federation of Labor also assumed a position of neutrality on the issue.)

Finally, careful research successfully challenged the view of the utility that adoption of lifeline rates would cost jobs in California. Sources that held the confidence of labor were cited to show this was not the case.

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Again, there are lessons to be drawn. The most powerful weapon now employed by corporate America is its ability to "divide and conquer." This tactic is used consistently to play groups against one another. It is almost always successful because bases must be covered prior to the attack, and the confidence of leaders or organized labor must be won before it begins. To frustrate successfully these efforts to divide and conquer, two major things must happen. First, relationships must be created with organized labor. Second, facts from sources that labor respects and holds in confidence must be produced. The E&GP campaign did both, and went on to win the campaign. Many other statewide efforts to win lifeline followed. However, they were, for the most part, defeated, because those pursuing them borrowed the public-policy ideas but ignored the political process necessary to win allies who were in turn necessary for getting the policy adopted and implemented.

## A CITY-WIDE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION\*\*

In October, 1979, Larry Gordon was hired by Organize Training Center to explore with religious and labor leaders in San Francisco their interest in forming a broad-based, city-wide community organization. By 1981, 20 religious congregations, ten labor locals, and the San Francisco Labor Council were committed to the formation of such an organization. It was called the San Francisco Organizing Project (SFOP), and it maintained a relationship with OTC.

Each member organization of SFOP pays dues or a subscription fee ranging from \$350 to \$5,000 per year. Labor union locals are represented by their highest elected leaders. Member organizations are expected to develop broad participation from their own members who serve on its organizational and issue committees. Member organizations frame their own issues and receive support from the staff.

Prior to the formation of SFOP, over one year of conversations took place between leaders of religious congregations and those of labor unions. Each had stereotypes of the other. Suspicions of incompatible agendas were deep. Eventually these problems were resolved in the course of meetings of both large and small groups. During this period no action on issues took place. A need for allies as well as the discovery of mutually held common values were the cement that finally brought together these two forces. Rather than beginning with an issue, SFOP began with a common commitment to create an organization in which both religious congregations and organized labor would come together to address such issues as housing, employment, education, health care, city services, and crime. Each has recognized that acting alone contributes to the weakening of their respective institutions, and both have specified a common commitment to the values of the democratic and Judeo-Christian traditions. The organization is now working on problems of crime, inadequate housing, job opportunities

\*\*This portion of the article was written by Larry Gordon, Director of SFOP and an associate of OTC.

for minorities, and the like.

On May 15, 1983, the San Francisco Organizing Project will hold a founding convention. Leaders of the Project expect a minimum of 1,500 delegates and hope for more. Since their early formation they have been joined by additional unions and religious congregations, as well as by the Citizens Action League's San Francisco group. Other neighborhood-based organizations have indicated an interest in participating.

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

What lessons might be drawn from these three experiences? Why are they important? The following are, of necessity, brief. They suggest some of the answers.

- Whether in the public or private sector, management seeks to play organized workers against community groups. In the absence of deliberate efforts to frustrate such division, the advantages are with the boss.
- Careful, patient work can bring labor and community groups together. This can occur on an issue-by-issue basis. More significantly, it can take place in the context of building a broad-based permanent organization.
- The development of relationships between community and labor leaders is a prerequisite to subsequent issue- and organization-building activity. The values basis for such relationships is deep within the religious, labor, and populist traditions in America.
- The self-interest bases for new alliances is increasingly apparent as leaders of labor and community organizations find themselves without the power to defend and advance the interests of their own respective constituencies.
- Skillful organizing work by a full-time staff is part of the mix needed to create something deeper than a letterhead coalition. But skill is not all there is to it. There must be a respect for the institutional integrity of the organizations with which one is working. This means a respect for the leadership of the institution and the expectation that the leadership will challenge the organization with new or different ideas.

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For good historic and practical reasons labor, religious, and other voluntary-association leaders guard access to their respective rank and file. At the same time, it is in the development of participation with one another in common or mutually supportive activities that the power potential of an alliance is realized. The development of trust between parties precedes such an opening up of the ranks. And it is in this opening of the ranks that a renewed sense of purpose and mission is realized for all participants. Central to the work of organizing is the development of experiences and relationships whose depth will withstand attacks from the media and from other powerful sources of antagonism.

Developing "majority constituencies" means more than defining issues so that they are in the interest of the majority. So does it mean more than putting together temporary electoral coalitions of a number of diverse groups who numerically represent or can mobilize a majority on election day. While these efforts may be important, it is our failure to do more that, in part, has created the circumstances that allow for the election of a Ronald Reagan or for the defeat of tax reform, full employment, and other legislation that is in the interest of the vast majority of the American people. ■

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