

Intense Political Mobilization: The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor

by Larry Frank and Kent Wong

The L.A. County Federation of Labor has attracted national attention as a focal point of the new American labor movement. The emergence of Los Angeles as a union city has been an impressive accomplishment, especially in light of its anti-union history. The growth of labor power in the political arena, the organizing of new workers, the advancement of progressive public policy, and the forging of labor-community alliances, especially with immigrant communities, have all contributed to Los Angeles's new labor power. Power building in Los Angeles combines the sophisticated political work of the L.A. County Federation of Labor and the economic development activism fostered by its allies.

The L.A. Context

With over ten million residents, Los Angeles County has the largest population of any county in the United States. Within its eight hundred square miles sprawls the City of Los Angeles, the second largest city in the country with almost four million residents. Another eighty-seven cities are incorporated throughout Los Angeles County, and one million residents continue to live in unincorporated areas. The 2000 census reports that 45 percent of the county population is Latino, 31 percent Anglo other than Latino, 12 percent Asian, and 10 percent Black.¹

A once dominant manufacturing base is now overshadowed by the regional influences of the entertainment industries, trade-related businesses, and commercial development. Southern California lost its four auto plants, eight steel mills and three tire plants largely due to the national fiscal policies of the early 1980's.² Its powerful aerospace industry did not survive the ending of the Cold War and the transfer of

political regional allegiances.³ Once a stronghold of unionized manufacturing, about 500,000 light manufacturing jobs still remain in L.A. County, but in low wage non-union industries such as garment and food processing.⁴

Until the 1980's, Los Angeles was headquarters to a host of Fortune 500 companies and other major businesses. Their leaders were the oligarchy of the downtown business interests. These companies, such as Hughes, Rockwell, Litton, the Atlantic Richfield Company, Security Pacific Bank, Great Western Bank, even the Los Angeles Times, have been subjected to mergers, acquisitions, or closures. The heads of the remaining entertainment conglomerates, along with the major developers of the region, have largely replaced the old oligarchy at the seats of power.

Construction, business services, the hospitality industry and retail have all been greatly impacted by changes in the labor environment as union workers were replaced with contracted workers who were non-union and foreign born. Immigrants are currently measured at 36.2 percent⁵ of the Los Angeles population, 800,000 of which are estimated to be undocumented.⁶ It is in this context that labor in Los Angeles has reasserted its power over the past ten years.

The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor

The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor has 345 affiliates representing over 800,000 members. Its largest affiliates are the 75,000 long term care (homecare and nursing home) workers in SEIU 434B, the 45,000 county workers in SEIU 660, the 30,000 teachers in the AFT and NEA affiliated United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), and the 28,000 members in the various

IATSE locals working in the film and television industry. Its Executive Board is composed of thirty-five members representing key union leadership. It has a Committee on Political Education (C.O.P.E.) with ninety-five voting members and over 1300 delegates entitled to participate in its monthly delegates meeting.

The County Federation also houses a labor community services program which provides support for striking and laid-off workers through immediate crisis assistance, and major food distributions during holidays or at times of extreme need. Also housed at the County Federation is the research unit, the Center for Regional Employment Strategies (CRES). With political, mobilization, research, and communications departments, the federation has a staff of nearly twenty.

Tradition of Insider Politics

The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor was chartered in 1959 when six local AFL central labor councils merged with the countywide CIO four years after the national merger between the AFL and the CIO. Under Sig Arywitz, labor played a progressive role in Los Angeles through its support of Tom Bradley's unsuccessful mayoral run in 1969 and successful follow-up in 1973.⁷ Arywitz died soon after Bradley's election in 1973, and his assistant, Bill Robertson from the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union, was elected.⁸ With Bradley firmly entrenched as mayor for the next twenty years, the County Federation of Labor played an insider political role.

Hired in the early 1980's to direct the work of the Committee on Political Education (COPE), Jim Wood replaced Robertson in 1994. Wood was a more dynamic and forceful leader than Robertson though his politics were seen as more pragmatic or conservative, depending on the observer.⁹ Wood was formerly active in Frontlash (the

youth arm of the AFL-CIO) and the Social Democrats USA, and he embraced their politics. He was sometimes hostile to progressive forces within the federation and to progressive community leaders.

In addition to the endorsement process and the movement of political contributions, Jim Wood focused much of his efforts on development in Los Angeles. Appointed by Mayor Bradley in 1980 to the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), Jim Wood served as its chairman during the years that the CRA rebuilt the entire skyline of Los Angeles with the tremendous resources available through tax increment financing.¹⁰ The vast number of union construction jobs required for this endeavor strengthened the existing leadership's hand internally and externally. The skyline of downtown Los Angeles remains a testimony to the close relationship between the County Federation and the Bradley administration. But this relationship ended when the Bradley Administration ended.

Leadership Shifts

The current L.A. Federation leadership came to power after the tragic death of Wood from cancer in 1996. Before he died Wood expressed his desire to have Miguel Contreras, who he had hired as COPE director, succeed him¹¹. This vote, however, marked the L.A. County Federation's first contested election pitting Contreras against an Anglo local president. Bill Robertson opposed Contreras and was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* as saying, "Contreras is not qualified. Period."¹² In spite of opposition from the old guard who had worked with Robertson and the racial overtones in the campaign opposing him, Contreras was elected in May 1996, becoming the first person of color to assume this position.

Contreras's history and background were much different from Jim Wood's. Contreras came from

a family of farm workers in Dinuba, California, and learned organizing and movement politics during his years with the United Farm Workers of America. Along with a number of the UFW's best organizers, Miguel Contreras had been hired in 1977 by the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees. Contreras first came to Los Angeles when he was assigned by the international as trustee to HERE Local 11, which was undergoing a transformation of its own.

At HERE Local 11, Miguel Contreras worked closely with María Elena Durazo, who had been elected president in December 1986 as part of an opposition slate to the old guard leadership. Durazo became the first woman and first person of color to assume leadership of the local. Under her leadership, HERE Local 11 adopted a much more progressive agenda and militant tactics. She also helped empower a largely Latino immigrant membership that had been disenfranchised by the old administration. Previously, demands to translate the contracts into Spanish or to conduct membership meetings with the help of an interpreter had fallen on deaf ears.

When asked to reflect on the County Federation's successes since his election, Miguel offered the following:

Within a period of a few years, you had new leadership of the AFL-CIO, new leadership of SEIU, new leadership of HERE, as well as new leadership of the L.A. County Federation of Labor. In locals in Los Angeles, you had new leadership in a lot of unions too. You had the janitors organizing. You had the homecare organizing. And so I think it's a natural evolution that's happening, but we've been the convening point of these different operations. We have some great organizing commitments in Los Angeles from these national unions. And we continue to grow. For the longest time it was just SEIU and HERE, but now we've expanded to include

other unions. We've been getting great assistance from the new Laborers' president—again, new leadership. We have the new commitments from UNITE—again there is new leadership in UNITE. And locally...[s]ince I've been here, we've also had new leadership from the IATSE. So many different locals have new leadership in the past five years, and we've been able to bring them into labor's structure.¹³

Building Political Power

In the past decade, the L.A. County Federation of Labor has been transformed from an entity most known for its "checkbook politics" to a cutting edge political machine able to elect its own leadership into state and local office and to function as a key participant in regional politics.

The Old Model

From its inception in 1959, the L.A. County Federation of Labor played a key role in financing many Democratic political campaigns. In return for labor's largesse, the County Federation was seen as a player in the political arena and was often at the table on key development deals. But labor in Los Angeles also paid a price over time for its close relationship with the powers in the Democratic Party and the Bradley administration, as it became accustomed to operating largely without a field mobilization capacity.

Early Get Out the Vote Work

During the 1984 presidential election between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale, neither labor nor the Democratic Party had any substantive field capacity in the precincts. In order to have some union field program building up to the November election, Jim Wood opened up the federation offices to ex-UFW organizers who were working in the precincts while waging a local initiative campaign. Always interested in

the role of technology in organizing, Jim Wood attempted to develop some nascent field work over the next six years, figuring out how to match computerized membership rolls with the voter files and conducting early and fitful labor-to-labor campaign efforts¹⁴, but these efforts reportedly had more flash than substance.

The more substantive field operations in California at this time were being conducted by ex-UFW executive board member Marshall Ganz. Ganz had developed the “occasional voter” methodology while running a 1983 mayoral campaign in San Diego. This system, which took advantage of the recently computerized voter rolls, is widely embraced today. It focuses turnout efforts on voters with intermittent voting patterns, which allows “Get Out the Vote” (GOTV) work to more effectively target voters with a proven need to be encouraged to go to the polls. The early and documented success of this strategy in Senator Alan Cranston’s razor-thin 1986 victory over Republican challenger Ed Zschau and the ambitious 1988 Campaign for Participation and Democracy¹⁵ (which was led by Ganz along with María Elena Durazo, Miguel Contreras, and several of Los Angeles’s other progressive leaders) put resources back into field operations and trained the next generation of union leaders on how to run political campaign field efforts. This laid fertile ground for labor’s later electoral successes.

In April 1992, civil unrest came to Los Angeles in response to the acquittal of the LAPD officers who had been captured on videotape beating Rodney King. The resulting riots took their toll on Los Angeles’s existing Democratic power structure. In the 1993 mayoral election, Democrats and labor united around city council member Mike Woo. However, on the heels of the fifty-two deaths and massive property losses from the riots coupled with the huge loss of aerospace and defense contractor dollars at the end of the Cold War, Los Angeles voters elected

a Republican businessman named Richard Riordan, who ran on the platform, “Tough Enough to Lead L.A.”

When the Democrats lost the mayoralty of Los Angeles to a Republican, Bill Robertson stepped down as the County Federation’s secretary-treasurer, and Jim Wood was elected the following year. This was the year of the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 on the November 1994 statewide ballot. Not known as a risk taker, Jim Wood agreed to support a rally against the measure in downtown Los Angeles even though many elected Democrats and political consultants feared a backlash to the “sea of brown faces” and the “inevitable Mexican flags.”¹⁶ No rally in Los Angeles had gathered more than 60,000 since the 1940’s when labor had turned out 100,000 for their labor marches. But this time, labor, immigrant rights groups, and the ethnic media turned out over 100,000 demonstrators against Proposition 187 at Los Angeles City Hall. This experience coupled with the Republican miscalculation in attacking both undocumented and documented immigrants, first in California and then as part of Newt Gingrich’s national assault, helped forge a new and powerful political alliance between labor and the Latino community in California, and specifically in Los Angeles.

Signs of Power -- Key Electoral Battles

In the past decade a growing number of “labor champions,” including many union and community activists, have been elected to local and state office in L.A. County. The selected chronology below provides a sense of labor’s growing political influence.

1994: A representative from the United Teachers of Los Angeles and a previous local president of the American Federation of Government Employees wins the primary for an

Assembly seat in Northeast Los Angeles. Antonio Villaraigosa had a long and strong history with progressives in the L.A. labor movement and with María Elena Durazo in particular. The success of the Villaraigosa campaign against the old guard Latino leadership in Los Angeles was not lost on the County Federation.

1996: Having lost the state assembly to Republican control, the County Federation endorsed three Democratic challengers and ran field and independent mail programs in these contested seats, winning all three races and helping to bring back Democratic control of the State Assembly.

1997: Labor endorses Gilbert Cedillo, the recent general manager of the largest county workers union, SEIU 660, for a special election Assembly seat representing the overwhelmingly Latino downtown Los Angeles. Behind by double digits, the campaign developed a targeted registration drive and then focused an independent walk program and direct mail effort on occasionally voting and newly registered Latino voters. The campaign literature explained that Gil Cedillo and labor were Los Angeles's champions against the immigrant-bashing Republicans and Governor Pete Wilson. Gilbert Cedillo, a virtual unknown before the race, won a commanding victory¹⁷ against the old guard's better-known candidate who had previously served on the L.A. School Board.

1998: Labor in California conducts an all out effort to defeat Proposition 226, an attempt to ban the collection of COPE dollars without individual annual written authorizations from union members. Hundreds of staff were loaned from unions to the L.A. County Federation.¹⁸ In the fall of 1998, labor and the Democrats finally get back the governorship.¹⁹ The election of additional

Latino Democratic assembly members strengthens the power of the Latino caucus and they elect the first Latino speaker, Cruz Bustamante.

1999: In the city elections, Labor throws its weight behind Alex Padilla, the now city council president, for a San Fernando Valley seat. But possibly of greater importance, one of labor's strongest allies, Antonio Villaraigosa, is elected to the speakership of the state Assembly. This ushers in an era of greater access for the L.A. County Federation in local, state, and national politics.

2000: The County Federation of Labor focuses its now considerable electoral power behind a progressive challenger in a primary for the House of Representatives, endorsing state senator Hilda Solis. Solis had led the successful 1986 fight to increase the state minimum wage. She and the County Federation were challenging a long-standing member of Congress, Marty Martinez, with a relatively prolabor voting record. Mainstream Democratic leaders across the country were aghast that labor would violate their long-standing commitment not to oppose Democratic leaders who had a moderately supportive voting record. Defending this move, Miguel Contreras explained to everyone on the campaign trail that being a business Democrat was not good enough, that unions needed "labor warriors" and "labor champions." Hilda Solis defeated Marty Martinez in the primary and went on to become one of labor's strongest allies in Congress. In the fall, labor's candidates won two of three additional contested Congressional races with Republicans.

2002: Facing a Chamber of Commerce funded opponent in the primary, labor successfully elects Fabian Núñez, the former political director of the L.A. County Federation, to

the state Assembly. In a short period of time, he is catapulted to the powerful position of speaker. While Governor Gray Davis is reelected in November, labor in Los Angeles scores two impressive victories by defeating a bold “white flight” scheme by the San Fernando Valley elite to secede from Los Angeles and by passing a parcel tax for the county’s public health care system (an initiative that needed and got a two-thirds vote of support).

2003: Two leaders with roots from within the labor movement are elected to the Los Angeles City Council. Following a carefully constructed plan by the County Federation of Labor, Antonio Villaraigosa beats an incumbent council member, taking over 50 percent of the vote in the primary. Villaraigosa and the L.A. Federation inflicted the first primary loss by an incumbent in the history of Los Angeles’ nonpartisan primary system. In the runoff elections Martin Ludlow, a former SEIU organizer and County Federation political director, goes from thirteen points behind in the primary to a commanding victory against an opponent who generated considerable support from the African American power structure. The win strengthens labor’s role with progressives in Los Angeles’s Black communities.

2004: Karen Bass, the executive director of the Community Coalition²⁰ and a close labor ally from South Los Angeles, is elected to the state assembly. With the support of the L.A. Federation and past political director and current council member Martin Ludlow, the Bass campaign organized an impressive labor and community coalition, attracting support from unions, community organizations, and progressives throughout Los Angeles. When Bass assumes office in January 2005 she will become the first African American woman in the California State Legislature in ten years.

Many other labor electoral victories have not been recounted here, such as labor’s role in creating pro-labor council majorities in Long Beach and Inglewood, their work in the San Gabriel Valley in support of State Senator Gloria Romero and Assembly member Judy Chu, their close working relationship with progressive leaders such as Assembly member Jackie Goldberg, and their amazing recent success working with LAANE to defeat Wal-Mart’s attempt to force their way into Inglewood on the heels of the long and painful grocery workers strike in Southern California.²¹

The campaigns delineated above capture the key focused efforts by the County Federation, where hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised and spent in each effort, using a combination of financial support to candidate committees, internal labor-to-labor campaigns, and the development of one or more independent expenditure campaigns. These independent expenditure campaigns are often constituency-based towards immigrants, Latinos, Blacks, or women. In these efforts, labor has dramatically expanded their technical abilities in targeting voters, and the skills of their full-time precinct walkers, paid loss-timers primarily from SEIU 1877, HERE 11, and UNITE. Each campaign now seeks to talk to a sufficient number of voters in order to have sufficient targets to turn-out and win the specified election with that target number. Voter contacts are made by full-time precinct walkers with help from weekend volunteer walkers. The walk numbers are heavily supplemented through full-time and volunteer phone calls at the federation’s forty-station predictive dialing phone bank and SEIU Local 99’s fixed and mobile predictive dialing stations.²²

To pay for these efforts at the L.A. Federation, additional funds in excess of the per capita payments are raised from affiliates, often as

much as three hundred thousand dollars to fund the labor to labor program and the independent expenditure campaigns. And some affiliates are now able to conduct their own independent expenditure campaigns focused, for example, on a separate radio, billboard, or open placement sign campaign as a part of Labor's overall effort.²³ Furthermore, the City's campaign finance law provides a one-for-one matching fund program on the first \$250 for council office, or \$500 for citywide office, up to a certain maximum, so that Labor's candidates have often been able to raise sufficient progressive and other dollars, allowing Labor to focus their efforts directly into a highly targeted field and mail program.

Finally, key participants in the L.A. Federation supported a community based alliance in the development of a separate non-partisan constituency-based voter participation effort that focuses on voter education and turn-out in underrepresented communities through walk, phone, and/or mail efforts, be they immigrants, Latinos, African-Americans or women. This non-partisan, non-profit corporation, the Voter Improvement Program (VIP), was institutionalized through a periodic VIP dinner starting in 1997. These dinners now raise up to \$1 million through a joint sponsorship of labor organizations, key corporate allies and community groups throughout L.A.²⁴

At this point in history, there is a pro-labor majority in the Los Angeles city council, and among the state and federal elected delegations. The L.A. County Board of Supervisors remains largely immune to Labor's power because of the size of the huge districts, the way they have been carved, the lack of term limits, and an early unsuccessful campaign against a current board member. Overall, the trend in Los Angeles is toward labor's increasing electoral influence as the Latino population remains on the rise and labor continues to hone its relationships and its skills.

Building an Immigrant-Labor Voting Block: the Organization of Los Angeles Workers (OLAW)

Labor's growing electoral success in L.A. is the result of its systematic efforts to build a solid grassroots political organization and a mobilized voting base. The centerpiece of this new political capacity rests in a labor-immigrant alliance forged at the door-to-door level.

Labor and the Democratic Party had questioned the value of electoral efforts in Latino communities prior to recent demographic shifts. Registration work in Latino neighborhoods in the early 1980s produced cards that were less than 50 percent Democratic and over 30 percent Republican. After factoring in the differing turnout expectations between parties, Democrats questioned the efficacy of nonpartisan voter registration drives among Latinos. However, newer voters who got their citizenship during the Republican attack in the 1990s have proven not only overwhelmingly Democratic but also strong supporters of labor's champions. As a result, the California State Assembly, which fell briefly into Republican hands toward the end of Speaker Willie Brown's run, is now two votes short of a two-thirds Democratic majority in the forty-member Senate and six votes short of a two-thirds Democratic majority in the eighty-member Assembly.

The mobilization of this new alignment was sparked in early 2000 when labor led a coalition of immigrants' rights organizations in an amnesty campaign that filled the L.A. Sports Arena with sixteen thousand supporters inside and over four thousand more cheering outside. Miguel Contreras, along with María Elena Durazo and SEIU international vice president Eliseo Medina, set about to harness this power politically. They set up the Organization of Los Angeles Workers (OLAW) to develop a cadre of skilled union members who would be paid their regular salary

to work with the union on political campaigns (these are known as lost-timers).²⁵ In addition to HERE Local 11, SEIU Local 1877 (Justice for Janitors), and UNITE members, full-time walkers came initially from the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, Clinica Romero (a Salvadoran immigrant solidarity organization), and a number of Mexican and Guatemalan hometown associations.²⁶

OLAW's first outing in 2000 focused sixty full-time walkers on two Republican-occupied congressional districts. In a parallel effort the UFW took on a third congressional race in L.A. Operating outside traditionally acknowledged Latino communities, OLAW targeted forty thousand Latinos in these previously Republican districts for turnout, using candidate comparisons, a pledge card, and a “stand up and be counted” message to move these voters to the polls. Two of these three Republican seats became Democratic with the election of Adam Schiff and Jane Harman in the November election.²⁷ Eliseo Medina explains OLAW's work in an interview:

Sometimes the details are important... We made up *compromisos*, commitment sheets, on NCR paper. The person at the door signed and kept one copy, and the other copy went into our data bank. That built in a lot of accountability with our loss-timers because they had to show a signature, not just circle a code.... And the commitment was focused on making voting a social act. The commitment forms said, ‘*Por la amnistia, por derechos, mi familia vota 100 percento.*’ [For amnesty, for rights, my family is voting 100 percent.]... We tried to make everything a family act to magnify the work and make it resonate.

Defeats as well as successes have built the political clout of labor and its immigrant allies. In 2001, in a bold move, the County Federation

“bet the farm” on Antonio Villaraigosa, the former union president and now Speaker of the Assembly, in his run for mayor.²⁸ In this race, OLAW fielded one hundred and fifty full-time loss-timers for the full six weeks before the election, and four hundred and fifty full-timers in the four days leading up to both the primary and runoff.²⁹ In addition, the County Federation fielded a powerful labor-to-labor campaign and a separate independent expenditure campaign. Miguel Contreras reports that in one day in Los Angeles, on the Saturday before the run-off election, two thousand seven hundred people walked precincts for Antonio Villaraigosa.³⁰ Labor's candidate placed first during the primary but was defeated by seven points in a racially tinged general election by another Democrat, James Hahn, the former city attorney. Despite the ultimate loss, this effort invigorated Los Angeles, conveying the power and energy of the labor-Latino-progressive alliance.

In each race OLAW's loss-timers have gained new skills. Tracy Zeluff, SEIU State Council's field director, comments:

They start with the task of delivering a message, working as a team, being accountable, being more assertive. They develop politically, organizationally, personally, and they take these skills back into the workplace for their union. And the next campaign they are there again, but this time as a team leader or possibly running several teams. A number of OLAW full-timers are now getting ready to go to Arizona and New Mexico, planning to run significant pieces of field operations in these battleground states. These are investments that have paid off over multiple elections.³¹

In addition to its electoral prowess, OLAW also focuses on improving the public's understanding of labor, especially in its base communities. As early as 1994 with the 100,000 supporters who turned out at City Hall against Proposition 187,

it became clear to labor that the ethnic media had the capacity to be a partner on several fronts. Continuing to push on this front in developing the precinct work, Eliseo Medina explains, “We would often run paid media in the Spanish language press and use this to leverage Public Service Announcements (PSA’s) with our non-partisan message. We would then routinely invite news anchors and reporters to walk with our teams and this would create a buzz, a drumbeat for our efforts. In this way, labor became a partner with the community.”³²

As a next step, OLAW and the County Federation worked with Spanish-language Univision (channel 34) to conduct citizenship fairs. At the Lincoln Park event, every consulate in Los Angeles set up a booth and over 3,000 people attended to inquire about the citizenship process as it relates to their country of origin. Channel 34 set up call-in shows with a toll-free number into the SEIU Local 99 phone bank. Univision started conducting other call-in shows with labor, marketing them “*Treinta Cuatro en Su Lado*” [Channel 34 on Your Side]. They advertised and televised a question and answer session with immigration attorneys, and the union recruited fifty immigration attorneys to staff SEIU Local 99’s call center. That session led to over 200,000 phone requests. For a question and answer session on L.A. schools, the union recruited school district and union representatives to field another barrage of questions, and a session on community-police relations filled the phone bank with LAPD community affairs representatives. In this way, Eliseo Medina explains:

With the phone bank at Local 99, the TV has the SEIU logo behind all of the experts and people start to understand that labor has a role on all these key issues... As a result of these and other efforts, the new voters in L.A. are now almost as progressive as the San Francisco voter base. With nine to ten million non-citizen

permanent residents, many of them in key states such as Florida, New Mexico and Arizona, whoever is figuring out how to do this work can make all the difference.”³³

Concerns Along the Path: Shifting Racial Terrain

While building an axis of labor-immigrant political power, L.A. leaders have had to negotiate the complex terrain of Black-Brown relations. From the Bradley years, labor was usually seen as a reliable ally to the Black community. African Americans ran the bus drivers union, the city employees union, the classified school employees union, the letter carriers union, several other public sector locals, and added the homecare workers union. But in the 1980’s other once unionized industries began contracting out traditional African-American jobs in hotels and building services and began filling these “new” jobs with non-union Latino workers. With the ongoing demographic shift and the constant battle for available turf and resources, deep Black-Brown tensions emerged in neighborhoods, the schools, the streets, the jails and prisons, and the gangs, and these tensions spilled into every area of life. They played out in battles against the further contracting out of African American jobs in the public sector to low-wage Latino subcontractors. And they played out in the siting of schools to accommodate the burgeoning Latino population.³⁴

Labor’s electoral work in Los Angeles played out on this same stage. There were some who feared that too close an identification between labor and Latinos would lead to the exclusion of other groups. Indeed, powerful political players were not above exploiting that divide. Toward the end of the 2001 mayoral campaign, Democratic candidate James Hahn released his smoking crack-pipe ad with grainy images of Antonio Villaraigosa meant to solicit fear from the average voter, *à la* Willie Horton.³⁵ This fear message

played well to Hahn's base among Anglo voters in the conservative west San Fernando Valley along with his African American base in South Los Angeles.³⁶ By contrast, Antonio Villaraigosa's relationships of trust across race and ethnic lines were very deep. And his diverse allies argued the importance of a multiracial embrace of the coalition candidate who preceded the coming Latino majority. The Villaraigosa loss and the elected Black leadership's overwhelming support for James Hahn, partially because of his father's legendary largesse on the Board of Supervisors, caused some soul-searching at the County Federation.

This led to the focus on Martin Ludlow's race in 2003. Wit Ludlow, Labor was running its strongest ally in the Black community. Ludlow had worked previously at SEIU, Speaker Villaraigosa's L.A. office, as the County Federation's COPE director during the Villaraigosa campaign, and as chief of staff to African American Assembly Speaker Herb Wesson. He presented the very face of coalition politics: an African American adopted into an Anglo family who had long relationships of trust with both Latino and African American leaders. Labor presented a powerful and united campaign in supporting his candidacy and the progressive Black leadership in Los Angeles was empowered through the Ludlow victory.

In the very next local race, labor embraced a progressive African American ally in Karen Bass' race to succeed Speaker Herb Wesson in the 47th Assembly District. Karen Bass had built a truly Black-Brown organization in South L.A. and had championed Villaraigosa's mayoral effort there. As ethnic housing barriers have been broken down by the vast influx of Latinos, large numbers of African Americans have left inner city neighborhoods and spread throughout Southern California. As a result, traditional African American neighborhoods and legislative districts have changed dramatically. California which once

had fourteen Black state elected officials, now has six and none outside L.A. And the 2000 reapportionment of the 47th Assembly District turned this district from a majority African American seat to a plurality Anglo seat. Yet, because of the strength of the candidate, the efforts of labor and its allies, this traditionally Black seat remained a Black seat even though three strong African-Americans faced off here with an Anglo candidate in the wings. In fact, labor's overwhelming support for Karen Bass helped keep the prominent Anglo, who may have polled a plurality, from throwing his hat in the ring.

With the victories of Martin Ludlow and Karen Bass, labor and its allies developed African American loss-timers with skills in the Black community to add to the loss-timers who have honed their skills in turning out Latino voters. And labor can also now operate with increased legitimacy in South Los Angeles, without being accused of acting as an invading army or a front for the coming Latino majority.³⁷

Concerns Along the Path: Union Electoral Division

The L.A. Federation has been able to build electoral power by developing a measure of unity among its affiliates over political endorsements. They have been able to muster the two-thirds vote required to endorse a candidate in each of the races detailed above, despite regular challenges to these endorsements from individual affiliates. Some unions have at times gone their own way on specific endorsements, but because of the power of the L.A. Federation's collective program, the impact of this division of labor's resources has been minimized. The mayoral race in 2001 and the upcoming race in 2005 provide some useful insights into this issue.

In 2001, almost all of the unions that represent city workers endorsed city attorney James Hahn

over Villaraigosa, but they did not have enough votes to block a two-thirds endorsement for Villaraigosa. In 2005, the city unions that backed Hahn in 2001 will have many more allies within labor in the next round as Hahn is now the incumbent. Since the last mayoral election, labor has developed strategic alliances with Mayor Hahn primarily through their support of his campaign to stop the San Fernando Valley secession effort that threatened municipal financing. This initial alliance led to labor's appointment by the mayor to key positions throughout Los Angeles.³⁸

However, the mayor has angered the Black establishment by firing African American police chief Bernard Parks. Parks easily won a council seat and is now running against his former boss with the strong support of Hahn's previous African American base. And Robert Hertzberg, the assembly speaker who followed Villaraigosa, is mounting a significant challenge to the mayor likely to erode any base the mayor has left in the San Fernando Valley because of the mayor's campaign against Valley secession. On August 2nd, council member Antonio Villaraigosa announced his intentions to run against the mayor. A minority of labor invokes the Bradley campaign's second successful run four years after the initial loss as support for this second campaign. Others are either satisfied with incumbent Hahn, who has recently reached out to labor at every recent opportunity, or are convinced that he is likely to be reelected and do not want to be again outside the halls of power. This complex situation, which in some ways results from the L.A. Federation's prior successes, will be a challenge to their leadership role in the next city election cycle.

Cashing in on Political Work: The County Federation's Role in Organizing and Bargaining

The L.A. Federation's successful efforts to build political power has translated into support in the

workplace. The County Federation's ability to translate electoral success into leverage can be seen in both support for affiliate organizing and contract bargaining.

Leverage for Organizing Campaigns

While the federation has not been directly responsible for the organizing victories, they have used their considerable political clout to assist in the organizing campaigns.

The Service Employees International Union has been the most dynamic organizing force in Los Angeles and throughout California. Two organizing victories have had national impact: The Justice for Janitors campaign organized thousands of largely immigrant workers in the early 1990s. The L.A. Federation recruited labor and community support for many of the public demonstrations that galvanized the necessary political support in favor of their recognition and later contract efforts.³⁹ In 1999, the County Federation's closest ally in Sacramento, Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa, carried the legislation that created the public authority that allowed homecare workers to have an employer of record with which to bargain.⁴⁰ This campaign brought 74,000 new workers into labor's L.A. ranks.

In the last few years, SEIU has also scored impressive organizing victories in the Los Angeles health care industry with successes at the two large chains, Catholic Healthcare West and Tenet hospitals, and numerous independents. Thousands of new health care workers have been successfully organized, and hospital-based private sector health care within the past few years has gone from 8 percent organized to over 50 percent organized. This has been the result of a combination of strategic research, a top-notch team of organizers, strong labor and community alliances, and aggressive corporate campaigns targeting the major employers in the industry.

The County Federation's main contribution has been to get "labor's warriors" up to Sacramento, and these legislators have carried many bills in support of organizing. These bills have included prohibitions on the use of state funds to fight unions, card check legislation for state contractors, employer mandates on healthcare, limits on contracting and outsourcing, and bills to expand the prevailing wage. Most recently, the L.A. Federation's past political director and current speaker, Fabian Nunez, played the key role in negotiating labor's right to organize at the Indian casinos as part of the compacts negotiated by Governor Schwarzenegger between California and several of the tribes. In addition, the L.A. Federation has been able to help secure card check agreements for several member unions.

From 1998 to 2001, the L.A. County Federation of Labor hired an organizing director to try to support multi-union organizing campaigns and to work with affiliates to strengthen their organizing and bargaining capacity. Ultimately, this position was eliminated based on the difficulty the County Federation experienced in clearly defining their role in this arena. The County Federation continues to sponsor the work of the Los Angeles-Orange County Organizing Committee which is housed in their building. The LAOCOC holds monthly meetings with organizers, promotes best practices, and clears targets for organizing.

The difficulty that the County Federation has experienced in relation to organizing is not unlike the problems faced by the AFL-CIO nationally. As a coalition of existing unions, they do not have their own independent membership base or their own organizing targets. They can use their position and moral authority to encourage unions to organize and bargain effectively, but ultimately, whether unions organize and prepare sufficiently for their work actions is not really up to them. The experiences in this arena have led the County Federation of Labor to pursue their

current campaign to establish a million dollar defense fund (to be explored in the final section).

Leverage for Contract Campaigns

On the bargaining front, the County Federation has developed a powerful reputation in elevating the visibility of a local fight. In 2000, over 250,000 workers in Los Angeles were facing contract expirations. The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor skillfully coordinated membership mobilization, community outreach, and media to aggressively support the contract battles. The campaigns helped to strengthen the links between the existing unions and create a stronger sense of class solidarity in the area.

The first major campaign battle involved a three-week strike of the janitors. The strike attracted huge public support. Cardinal Roger Mahoney presided over a public mass for thousands of striking janitors. Members of the California legislature and the L.A. City Council jockeyed with each other to join with janitors in civil disobedience actions shutting down several major intersections during rush hour. Even the Republican mayor of Los Angeles publicly stated that the janitors were not asking for enough money at the bargaining table, much to the chagrin of his corporate backers.

At the height of the strike, thousands of janitors marched for fourteen miles from downtown Los Angeles to Century City. Thousands of supporters lined the streets, many with handmade signs of support. Many other office workers rushed into the crowd to spontaneously contribute to the striking workers. The bright red T-shirts worn by janitors became so publicly identified with the strike, that public bus drivers were giving free rides to any of the striking workers wearing a janitors' T-shirt. At the culmination of the three-week strike, the janitors won a 26 percent wage increase and full family

medical coverage. This strike has deservedly been studied as a model of union preparation.⁴¹

The janitor's strike set the pace for subsequent negotiations involving the bus drivers. The L.A. Federation's profile was even higher while it was supporting the United Transportation Union. Martin Ludlow, the L.A. Federation's political director was assigned to build support amongst elected officials and church leaders. The L.A. Federation's overall efforts on the coalition and media fronts helped build strong public support for their contract demands. And labor's legitimacy in the community with bus users and their advocates strengthened the bus drivers' position. It was the L.A. Federation that ultimately brought Jesse Jackson to Los Angeles and positioned Jackson as the mediator. And it was Jesse Jackson who brokered the high stakes dispute.

Labor's success with the janitors and the bus drivers worked to the advantage of the teachers, screen actors, and L.A. County workers later that year in helping to settle their disputes.

Over the past year, the County Federation of Labor has played a key role in supporting three worker actions. Members of the ILWU were locked out of their jobs by the Pacific Maritime Association, and the L.A. Federation sponsored successful labor solidarity efforts at the port on several occasions. When the Metropolitan Transit Authority's bus mechanics went out on strike in October 2003, labor's recently elected champions, Antonio Villaraigosa and Martin Ludlow, played the key front roles in moving the mediation proposal once Mayor Hahn appointed them to the board of the Metropolitan Transit Authority and they won a related legal case. And Miguel Contreras played the key background role in working with the MTA unions to settle this strike after five long weeks.

And then came the devastating strike and lockout of 70,000 grocery workers at Vons (Safeway), Albertsons, and Ralphs (Kroger) all across Southern California. The federation loaned five staff members to the UFCW during the course of the action. But the strike and lockout were emotionally draining on the staff who were dealing with the personal tragedies of union members whose strike fund benefits kept being reduced. The UFCW's lack of preparation for the titanic battle that ensued has become well understood. Less understood is the consensus-based decision-making of seven separate locals attempting to take on national companies at only a regional level. As hard as they worked, the die seemed already cast when the L.A. Federation became involved in this strike and lockout and they indicate that they have learned volumes from their solidarity efforts in support of this work action.

The County Federation's Coalition Building

The different campaigns and issues have provided the impetus for several coalition relationships worthy of mention. In the electoral arena, a number of community organizations participate in the field campaigns that are based at the County Federation of Labor, most notably Hermandad Mexicana Nacional and ACORN. Each electoral effort pulls together a different electoral coalition depending on the district and the related issues, including the work of OLAW and its coalition partners.

The L.A. electoral arena cannot be addressed without some mention of the work of AGENDA (Action for Grassroots Empowerment and Neighborhood Development Alternatives), its coalition arm the Metropolitan Alliance, and their key organizer Anthony Thigpenn. AGENDA has teamed up in the past three years with the Community Coalition, SEIU Local 1877 (Justice for Janitors), SEIU Local 434B (Home Health Care) and SEIU Local 99 (Classified School

Employees) to build a 501(c)(4) labor-community field effort in South Los Angeles called ALLERT (Alliance of Local Leaders for Education, Registration, and Turn-out).

Intentionally developing Black/Brown precinct teams in the changing Black community, Anthony Thigpenn's work has been instrumental in spinning off independent expenditure efforts for candidates Martin Ludlow and Karen Bass. And while independent expenditure campaigns cannot coordinate with candidate campaigns, they can do some coordination with each other, and the close working relationship between the County Federation of Labor, AGENDA, the Community Coalition, and ALLERT has been highly productive. As a result, ALLERT has begun to play the role in the traditionally African-American community that OLAW continues to play in Latino communities.

In supporting the work of the constituency groups, the County Federation has turned the annual MLK breakfast into a fundraiser for the A. Phillip Randolph Institute (APRI), the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), Labor Committee for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC), and Pride at Work (the gay and lesbian constituency group of the AFL-CIO). The constituency groups meet together monthly just before the federation's delegates meeting.⁴²

The County Federation's Role in Labor Policy Debates

With the increased political power of the County Federation of Labor has also been increased activism on the public policy front. There are two major public policy areas where the federation has had a particularly successful impact: on immigration and immigrant workers and on economic justice and the living wage.

Immigrant Rights

The County Federation of Labor has been instrumental in helping to change the national policy of the AFL-CIO with regard to immigration as well as advancing policy initiatives in California that have impacted immigrants.

The AFL-CIO change in policy came about in part as a result of a new wave of immigrant worker organizing in the 1990s, including the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles. The janitors' campaign successfully unionized thousands of Latino immigrant workers and captured the spirit and imagination of millions throughout the country. The campaign has generated international interest, in part because of Ken Loach's film, *Bread and Roses*.

Other Los Angeles unions have won impressive gains in organizing immigrant workers, including the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE); the Union of Needletrade, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE); the International Association of Machinists (IAM); SEIU's Homecare local, and numerous building trades unions, in particular, the Laborers and the Painters.

Prior to 2000, the activities of unions in Los Angeles were putting them increasingly at odds with the national policy of the AFL-CIO that continued to oppose the granting of legal status to undocumented workers and supported employer sanctions, including civil criminal penalties for hiring the undocumented. Unions in Los Angeles argued that the AFL-CIO could not continue to encourage immigrant workers to join their ranks while, at the same time, upholding policies opposed to immigrant workers' interests. This conflict came to a head at the 1999 AFL-CIO convention in Los Angeles. Several unions, most notably the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), HERE,

UNITE, the United Farm Workers of America (UFW), and California-based central labor councils took the lead in advancing a resolution from the convention floor to change the AFL-CIO's policy regarding immigrant workers. While no consensus was reached at the convention, John Sweeney appointed a committee to review the matter, chaired by John Wilhelm, president of HERE. By the February 2000 executive committee meeting, the AFL-CIO adopted a new platform in defense of immigrant rights. This resulted in a dramatic shift in the national debate on immigration reform and once again brought the issues of legalization and the repeal of employer sanctions to the forefront.

In the summer of 2000, the AFL-CIO held a series of "Town Hall" meetings to announce their change in immigration policy and to reach out to immigrant workers to share their stories. The most impressive of these meetings, discussed earlier, was held in Los Angeles where 20,000 immigrant workers turned out at the downtown Sports Arena for a powerful immigrant rights rally that, in a historic turnaround, was led by the American labor movement.

In California, unions were major supporters of legislation introduced by State Senator Gilbert Cedillo, a former union leader, providing drivers' licenses for undocumented immigrants. Although passed into law and signed by Governor Gray Davis, this law was subsequently overturned with the election of Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Labor continues to play a central role in negotiating a compromise with the Schwarzenegger administration. Also on the immigrant rights front, the national chairperson for the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, María Elena Durazo, is based in Los Angeles, and Los Angeles became an organizing center for the October 2003 national effort.

Economic Development and the Work of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE)

While a number of central labor councils have spun off their own non-profit entities that work on economic justice and economic development, LAANE largely occupies that turf in Los Angeles. It is thus important to understand LAANE's role and their relationship with the L.A. Federation

In 1993 HERE Local 11 launched LAANE as a nonprofit advocate for workers' interests in the public policy arena. With its ability to attract foundation funding LAANE today supports roughly twenty staff. LAANE's work is three pronged: research, policy development and campaigns, and coalition work. Through all three, LAANE works to refocus public debates about economic development on issues of economic justice and a worker's right to organize. Pursuing this work, involves LAANE is a wealth of on-the-ground organizing.

The Value of Research at LAANE

Research has proven critical to raise public awareness of the bankruptcy of current economic development policy and to identify areas for grassroots and policy action. In 2000, LAANE released a report detailing the magnitude of social and economic problems produced by the massive growth of low-wage jobs. This report built on earlier studies that focused light on the two major local economic development programs: the city's Commercial Redevelopment Agency and the Mayor's Los Angeles Business Team. With access to millions of dollars in public subsidies and other incentive mechanisms, these two programs helped drive development in the city. Researchers found that job quality was not a criteria being used in either program. Public efforts were not targeted specifically toward under-served communities. Indeed, the city had no coherent strategy targeting key industry

sectors, but rather focused its energy on attracting individual firms. The reports recommended far less emphasis on retail and much greater attention to smaller projects. The recommendations also looked toward living wage policies, labor peace compacts, greater attention to job creation and job quality, and far more public accountability. Together, these three reports articulated an organizing agenda for energizing local progressive politics.

Policy Action: Retention and Living Wage

Starting in 1993 LAANE led a successful campaign to pass the country's first worker retention ordinance that required existing workers to be hired during a change of contractors. Amongst others, the ordinance helped save the jobs of hundreds of airport employees. This worker retention ordinance played a key role in supporting HERE and SEIU organizing efforts at LAX, since key committee members could not be easily discarded with a change of contractors.

In 1997 LAANE spearheaded the effort to enact Los Angeles's living wage law. The Los Angeles Living Wage campaign had a powerful impact on the local political scene. An impressive coalition of labor unions, religious groups, community organizations, and economic justice advocates joined together and launched a spirited campaign. Rallies and demonstrations were held in the City Hall chambers. During one holiday season action, actor David Clennon came dressed as the ghost of Christmas past complete with chains and moneyboxes, deriding greedy employers for refusing to pay their workers a living wage.

The living wage policy that was adopted by the city council was the first to include a provision for health benefits and has become a national model. It was also the first piece of living wage legislation to bar retaliation by employers against their workers. The ordinance also pioneered living wage coverage that applied to those that

lease land from the city, those requiring city operating permits, or those receiving city financial assistance as well as the already established coverage of contractors. More recently, LAANE coordinated with the County Federation to secure a county living wage ordinance and a Pasadena living wage law. Both LAANE and the L.A. Federation support an ongoing living wage battle in Santo Monica.

LAANE's work on the L.A. living wage has emerged as a model for aggressive enforcement. LAANE actively monitors the city's contracting and economic development activity in order to actively intervene in the process. The living wage coalition pushed the city council to take city enforcement efforts out of the unsympathetic and ineffective hands of the office charged with implementing the living wage law and placing authority into a new staff established for that purpose. LAANE has been the implementation arm of a city-sponsored program to train covered workers on their rights under the living wage ordinance.

This living wage work has helped produce leverage to support workers' right to organize. At LAX, the living wage coalition has intervened in the process by which the airport grants food concessions, supporting employers who are committed to respecting their workers right to freely decide whether or not to join a union. They have also obtained amendments to the original living wage law to make clear that the airlines themselves are covered and to provide strong protections and employer sanctions in workplaces where workers are harassed for discussing their rights under the living wage ordinance. The retention law protects union and non-union workers from losing their job if a contract changes hand.

When the living wage law was passed 30,000 out of the 50,000 airport worker were not in a union. Since this time HERE has gone from representing

roughly one out of five airport workers in its bargaining to four out of five. SEIU has moved from representing one in ten workers within their jurisdiction to representing more than half. HERE has used the living wage coalition's support to win a neutrality agreement and subsequent union recognition at the new site of the Academy Awards in Hollywood. SEIU also won union jobs for janitors using the living wage law and coalition support.

Policy Action: Community Benefits Agreements

LAANE has also pioneered work to develop community and labor involvement in the economic development process through the strategy of community benefits agreements. These community benefits agreements take the form of legally binding documents that are included as part of the formal economic development agreement between local government and the developer.

By 2002, LAANE's Accountable Development Project had helped coalitions secure private and legally binding agreements with five major entertainment, housing & retail, and industrial development projects. The first breakthrough agreement, with the massive Staples development, was won in coalition with SAJE (Strategic Actions for a Just Economy) and set the framework for future work. All such large scale development projects benefit from millions of dollars of public funds. Community benefits agreements commits the developer to such provisions as 70-75% living wage jobs at the business which will operate in the developments, affordable housing and childcare centers, a youth center, local hiring, a neighborhood improvement fund, and card check recognition and employer neutrality during union organizing. In one case, the developer approached LAANE because community support can help make a proposed development project's journey through the public approval process much easier.

In attempting to institutionalize a community benefits process, LAANE has pushed for the requirement of a social impact report that details the social impact of certain developments. This effort has required dialogue with some of the building trades and the mayor's office, both of which initially opposed such reforms. This effort seeks to lay the framework for subsequent community benefits negotiations. The long-term goal is to institutionalize such practices so that an assessment of the community impact is a normal city action and so that large developers are required in certain instances to sign a community benefits agreement as part of the normal public approval process.

LAANE's Role in Building Coalition Capacity

On the religious front, the County Federation of Labor has developed a close working relationship with Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE). This organization was developed by LAANE in pressing their living wage campaign and continues to be based at LAANE's main office. CLUE has been deeply involved in supporting Justice for Janitors, the grocery workers, and the battle shaping up between HERE and the region's hotel industry. CLUE has also directly aided area unions. For example, when the Westside Hotels balked at a first contract with the HERE to gradually raise housekeepers' wages from \$8.15 to \$11.05 an hour, CLUE dispatched small teams in full ministerial garb to deliver brief sermons on workplace fairness while ordering coffee at several hotel dining rooms. On April 8, 1998, an interfaith procession of sixty ministers, priests, and rabbis marched through Beverly Hills to deposit bitter herbs outside the Rodeo Summit Hotel, which still had not signed the HERE agreement, and offer milk and honey to the two which had. Two months later the Summit signed. CLUE has organized similar religious support for a campaign against a union-busting hotel in Santa

Monica, an organizing drive at St. Francis Hospital, and protests over the University of Southern California's decisions to contract out work to low-wage employers. In addition to CLUE, the County Federation has a strong working relationship with the Catholic Archdiocese, holding an annual workers' mass on Labor Day at Cardinal Mahoney's new cathedral. And on the Sunday before Labor Day, the County Federation continues to build their Labor in the Pulpit program, primarily in South Los Angeles.

LAANE also developed Santa Monica's Responsible Tourism (SMART) as a grassroots member organization that has pushed living wage and economic justice issues. SMART developed a zone-based living law that would have required all employers within the city's lucrative coastal zone to pay a living wage. The ritzy-tourist industry has benefited enormously from the public investment provided within the zone only to generate an exploding low-wage workforce. To head off the measure an alliance of wealthy hotel and restaurant owners placed a bogus "living wage" law on the ballot that would have covered few workers and prohibited the city from passing any further living wage statutes. LAANE, SMART, and the County Federation helped defeat this sham proposal and won city council passage of their authentic living wage law. Unfortunately, the opposition forced the new law onto the ballot. In November 2002, a scare campaign convinced a majority of voters to rescind the law. Despite this setback, SMART's organizing has continued to support the unionization of several of these coastal hotels.

Relationship Between LAANE and the Los Angeles County Labor Federation

In many ways, LAANE operates in the political space that has been created by the L.A. County Federation of Labor. When Mayor Hahn sought détente with labor -- after his campaign against

labor's mayoral candidate and in order to add labor's muscle to the defeat of the Valley secession effort -- the L.A. Federation's first request was to have the mayor appoint LAANE's executive director, Madeline Janis-Aparicio, to the powerful Community Redevelopment Agency. Aparicio now occupies one of labor's two seats on the CRA.

A recent collaboration between LAANE and the County Federation demonstrated how economic development and electoral work combine in support of union causes when the two led an effort to successfully defeat Wal-Mart's multimillion dollar effort to site a supercenter in Los Angeles's inner city community of Inglewood. LAANE did all the early work in Inglewood with the leadership of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE). The church-based organizing framed the coalition work and LAANE's research effort framed the issues. The UFCW and the L.A. Federation had helped bring pro-labor council members onto the Inglewood City Council so that Wal-Mart was forced to bypass the council through an initiative in order to enter the jurisdiction.

With the grocery strike and lockout tying the UFCW's hands both politically and financially in the months leading up to the Inglewood election, the L.A. Federation engineered the placement of the region's largest UFCW support march and rally through the streets of Inglewood. This very public event with over ten thousand supporters highlighted the claim by the grocery chains that they were forced to dramatically cut the wages and benefits of grocery workers because of the entry of forty Wal-Marts into the California market. And when the Walmart initiative was voted on one month later in April 2004, the treatment of the grocery workers was fresh on everyone's mind. Compared to the two million dollars spent by Wal-Mart in support of their initiative and the additional millions spent on advertising images of happy workers into the

L.A. market, the L.A. Federation spent less than \$150,000 in the final three weeks of the campaign on a highly targeted walk and phone operation and managed to defeat the Wal-Mart measure with a 61 percent no vote. LAANE's early and constant work on this campaign was essential in building the local campaign and cannot be overstated, while the L.A. Federation's role was also necessary to the result.⁴³

Political columnist Harold Meyerson recently observed,

The political clout LAANE brings to the table is not really its own. It belongs chiefly to the L.A. County Federation of Labor, whose election-day batting average is so high that local elected officials flout its agenda—which very much includes LAANE's agenda—on virtual penalty of political death. It would be an overstatement to say that the Fed provides the muscle and LAANE the brain for working-class Los Angeles—Fed leader Miguel Contreras is an innovative strategist and Janis-Aparicio is no mean organizer—but it wouldn't be wrong exactly, either.

A trip through the city's corridors of power these days provides a clear indication of the effect LAANE has had over the past decade. "The debate is different now," says Janis-Aparicio. "Decision-makers talk about poverty and the lack of affordable housing, in City Council meetings, at commissions, even at the Chamber of Commerce." In a city of chutes, LAANE has assembled some ladders.⁴⁴

Future Ambitions for the L.A. Federation

The L.A. County Federation of Labor is currently embarking on a new campaign to hold the first county-wide delegates' convention on September 30, 2004. To achieve this goal, the L.A. Federation will "house visit" each of the 327 affiliates of the federation with over one

hundred members, to encourage their active participation in federation activities, and to assure that their delegates are assigned and attend a thousand-member delegates' convention to chart the path forward. The goal of these mobilization efforts is to strengthen the overall participation of the County Federation unions and to in turn strengthen the capacity of the federation to do more. The plan to be laid out at the General Assembly is three-fold: one electoral and two programmatic.

On the electoral front, the Federation needs to expand its capacity because, due to term limits, there will be sixteen open senate and assembly seats in its jurisdiction in 2006. The immediate focus is in defending a contested Senate seat that has been targeted by new Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. The long-term plan is to develop more "labor warriors" for Sacramento and the Los Angeles City Council. Plans are just now being developed by the L.A. Federation, focused on strengthening its regional COPE committees in the San Fernando Valley, the San Gabriel Valley, and the Harbor.

There are also two programmatic plans that are being discussed. The first would be to set up a \$1 million campaign defense fund to assist unions in organizing and contract campaigns. This would not be a strike fund, but would instead provide resources that would enable the L.A. Federation to intervene more aggressively in support of significant union campaigns. It will thus give the federation more leverage to help these unions plan ahead and conduct their campaigns in ways that will build public understanding and support. As Miguel Contreras says, "None of us are independent. If one union loses its battle over health care benefits, other unions will definitely suffer. When another union is forced to accept a two-tier system, it is that much harder for the rest of labor."⁴⁵

The second programmatic plan is to launch a public policy campaign that will help promote labor's social change agenda on a larger scale. The current proposal is to eliminate fees for Los Angeles city residents for the first year of community college, to be paid by a local employer tax or fee. The two-year community college system serves the working class of Los Angeles, and the colleges are highly unionized institutions, including faculty and staff. In addition, the first and second years of higher education are decisive in determining the long-term earning power of working people. The hope is that this plan will help to build a far-reaching labor and community alliance that also connects with youth to advance a change agenda that serves the working people of Los Angeles.

The L.A. County Federation of Labor has made huge strides in the last ten years. They have moved from an organization that represented the status quo, old guard union leadership, to one that aggressively embraces a social action agenda. They have revitalized the political scene; elected crucial progressive leaders, often from their own ranks, to local, state, and national office; forged new labor and community alliances; impacted local and statewide public policy through their own power and the work of their allies; and actually expanded their per capita membership. In the midst of a national decline in labor's power and influence, the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor indeed provides a degree of hope for working people.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. 2002. "California Quick Facts: Los Angeles County, California"

² Bluestone, Barry and Bennett Harrison 1982. *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*, New York: Basic Books.

³ With California's ex-governor, Ronald Reagan, in the White House, Los Angeles received over \$20 billion each year in defense-related prime contracts. The end of the Cold War coincided with the rise of presidents from Texas and Arkansas and the control of Congress by Republicans from Texas and the South. Many of these prime contracts left Southern California which had become Democratic turf. Aerospace companies and dependent electronics subcontractors had to either close

down or follow the defense dollars that still remained away from Southern California.

⁴ A review of California Employment Development Department data over time shows Los Angeles County's average manufacturing employment peaked in 1979 at 924,900 jobs, but has dropped to 500,000 in 2003. This material is documented by Goetz Wolff in his forthcoming article, *Manufacturing Still Matters in Los Angeles: Analysis of a Neglected Sector*, UCLA Urban Planning.

⁵ Los Angeles Almanac, based on the 2000 U.S. Census

⁶ The U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services estimates 2.6+ million undocumented immigrants statewide

⁷ Phone interview with Elinor Glenn, July 16, 2004.

⁸ Interview with Bill Robertson, July 22, 2004.

⁹ "Labor Federation's Robertson to Retire." *Los Angeles Times*, June 17, 1993, B3.

¹⁰ Tax increment financing is available in California in designated redevelopment zones, allowing the agency to amass the difference between the old property tax contribution and the amount that would have been assessed under the new appraisal and to use those monies to fund future development.

¹¹ Interview with Rick Icaza, June 29, 2004.

¹² Silverstein, Stuart 1996. *L.A. Labor Federation Vote Divides Along Ethnic Lines*, Los Angeles Times, April 17, D1.

¹³ Ruth Milkman and Kent Wong. 2001. *Interview with Miguel Contreras*, ILE Occasional Paper No. 5, September, p. 6.

¹⁴ Interview with Kelly Candaele, July 18, 2004, Labor to labor campaigns involve union members talking to other union members which can be done with union dues money, while labor to neighbor campaigns require the use of COPE dollars.

¹⁵ The Campaign for Participation and Democracy registered over a quarter of a million voters in California and built a precinct leader system in thousands of precincts across the state.

¹⁶ Phone interview with Kelly Candaele, quoting other consultants' comments, July 18, 2004.

¹⁷ The final vote tally gave Cedillo 43.75 percent of the vote to Castro's 22.12 percent.

¹⁸ Proposition 226 was defeated with a 60 percent no vote.

¹⁹ Gray Davis received 58 percent of the vote while Republican Dan Lungren received 38 percent.

²⁰ The Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment started as a progressive effort to address the impact of drugs and alcohol in South L.A. It has branched out to deal with liquor stores, the education gap, foster care, youth programs, and other issues. Its activists were key supporters of the Villaraigosa mayoral campaign in South L.A. The organization later helped develop a key c(4) labor-community partnership which has worked on initiative battles with labor and other partners.

²¹ In April 2004, Inglewood voted against Wal-Mart's arrival, 61 percent to 39 percent.

²² In this system, computers generate all phone calls and then place the details of a voter and a general script from which to work on a computer screen in front of a caller. The predictive system can weed out answering machines, busy signals, and not homes and restrict down time between calls to an average of ten seconds, greatly increasing both productivity and the callers' enjoyment of the experience. The strategic advantage that came from the County Federation's predictive dialing phone stations cannot be overstated.

²³ IBEW Locals 11 and 18 have conducted significant efforts in these areas.

²⁴ Interview with County Fed President Rick Icaza, June 29, 2004.

²⁵ The inclusion of a loss-time provision in union contracts, which allows the union to buy out the time of workers who are on leave from their job to work with their union, has been another cornerstone in the development of labor's political power.

²⁶ Phone Interview with Tracy Zeluff, July 24, 2004.

²⁷ Interview with Eliseo Medina, June 30, 2004,

²⁸ A description employed by Miguel Contreras in the *Los Angeles Times* in describing the County Federation's commitment to the Villaraigosa campaign.

²⁹ Phone interview with Tracy Zeluff, July 24, 2004.

³⁰ Ruth Milkman and Kent Wong. 2001. *Interview with Miguel Contreras*, ILE Occasional Paper No. 5, September, p. 13.

³¹ Phone interview with Tracy Zeluff, July 24, 2004.

³² Interview with Eliseo Medina, June 30, 2004.

³³ Interview with Eliseo Medina, June 30, 2004.

³⁴ Los Angeles needs to site and build over one hundred new schools focused especially in the increasingly dense central city. With manufacturing and other commercial space hopelessly polluted, the Los Angeles Unified School District has increasingly turned to residential zones. One prominent Black politician was quoted as making the following inflammatory yet true statement in attempting to stop the eminent domain of several Black owned homes, "They are tearing down African American homes to build schools for Latinos."

³⁵ This ad made reference to a letter that Antonio Villaraigosa sent on behalf of Carlos Vignali, an individual convicted for his role in a drug conspiracy, but it did not mention the panoply of other electeds who sent similar letters. For example, the Villaraigosa letter was much softer than the one sent by Los Angeles Archbishop Roger Mahoney. Harold Meyerson quotes Father Greg Boyle in the week before the election, "You look at the Vignali letter. That was a mistake. You look at the Hahn ad and say, That was morally reprehensible." (www.ncl.org/cs/conversations/documents/vargas_bad_feelings.html)

³⁶ James Hahn benefited from a peculiar coalition between conservative white voters, who found it difficult to vote for a Latino, and African American voters who loved James Hahn's father, perennial county supervisor Kenny Hahn, who represented South Los Angeles well and was the only elected leader to meet Martin Luther King Jr. at the airport when he first came to Los Angeles.

³⁷ The L.A. County Federation has worked hard to develop African American leadership throughout its ranks. Charles Lester is the Fed's political director and Steve Neal who is in charge of the Labor Community Services based at the Fed, has taken several leaves to run federation campaigns. Other African American staffers have also been key to the Fed's successes.

³⁸ For example, Miguel Contreras was appointed to the Airport Commission and ally Madeline Janis-Aparicio was appointed to the Community Redevelopment Agency soon after the successful conclusion of that campaign.

³⁹ Roger Waldinger, et.al. 1998, "Helots No More: A Case Study of the Justice for Janitors Campaign in Los Angeles," *Organizing to Win*, Cornell University Press, pp. 102-119.

⁴⁰ Phone interview with Antonio Villaraigosa, August 9, 2004.

⁴¹ Stephanie Arellano, "Year 2000 Justice for Janitors Campaign: Reflections of a Union Organizer," 2002. *Teaching for Change*, UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, George Meany Center for Labor Studies.

⁴² The L.A. Federation also connects to religious groups in ways that will be described later in the discussion of LAANE's work.

⁴³ LAANE organizers have carefully clarified the unique circumstances that led to the defeat of Wal-Mart, which talks of Wal-Mart overreaching and placing an initiative on the ballot that avoids all city input in their development within the city. They explain that Wal-Mart is unlikely to a similar mistake in the future.

⁴⁴ Harold Meyerson, 2003. "Ladders of Hope: How the Living-Wage Coalition is Remaking L.A.," *L.A. Weekly*, August 29.

⁴⁵ Interview with Miguel Contreras, August 2, 2004.