

Asian American Reproductive Justice Oral History Project
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
Northampton, MA

LORA JO FOO

Interviewed by

JUHEE KWON

July 29, 2013
Oakland, California

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Narrator

Lora Jo Foo (b.1951) is a labor organizer and attorney specializing in employment/labor law. She is born and raised in San Francisco Chinatown, where she began working as a garment worker in a sweatshop at the age of 11. She returned to the garment industry, and worked both as a union organizer and shop steward. In October of 1978, she became a hotel worker and was a leader in the 1980 citywide strike of 6,000 San Francisco hotel workers.

After graduating from Golden Gate Law School, she worked for a private labor law firm representing unions. Then from 1992 to 2000, she served as the employment/labor attorney for the Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco, California.

Ms. Foo left the Asian Law Caucus in 2000, and began her work on the Asian American women's issues and concerns report for Barbara Phillips at the Ford Foundation. She ended up writing a book titled, *Asian American Women: Issues, Concerns and Responsive Human and Civil Rights Advocacy*, and participated in a book tour in various states. She obtained a Masters in Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 2002. In 2004 and 2008, she was the National Coordinator of the AFL-CIO's Voting Rights Protection Program, where she launched programs to protect the vote in the battleground states. In 2006, she joined the California Faculty Association as its Northern California Organizing Director.

Foo co-founded the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum and was its National Chair from 1996 to 1998. She is also a co-founder of the California-based Sweatshop Watch and served as its Board President from 1995 to 2004. In 1995, she attended the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. She recently authored a new book, titled *Earth Passages*.

Interviewer

Juhee Kwon (b. 1991) is an undergraduate at Brown University, studying Biology and Ethnic Studies.

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Format

Interview recorded in MP3 file format using Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-702PC. Two files: (a) 15 min 25 sec, (b) 1 hour 34 min 7 sec.

Transcript

Transcribed and edited for clarity by Juhee Kwon. Reviewed and approved by Lora Jo Foo.

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Transcript of interview conducted July 29, 2013, with:

LORA JO FOO
Oakland, California

by: JUHEE KWON

KWON: This is Juhee Kwon. Today is July 29, 2013, and I am here with Ms. Lora Jo Foo at her home in Oakland, California for the Asian American Reproductive Justice Oral History Project. This is an effort to document the histories of Asian American women and their work, specifically in the field of reproductive justice. I have chance here today to interview Ms. Lora Jo Foo about her work in labor organizing, her involvement with NAPAWF [National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum], and then her recent publications, *Earth Passages* as well as her book on *Asian American Women*.

Perfect. Are those just your notes?

FOO: Right.

KWON: Okay. All right, thank you so much for doing this. Your house is absolutely wonderful and lovely.

FOO: Oh, thank you.

KWON: I wanted to start by going over the two topics you specifically mentioned in your email. You said that you wanted to talk about the garment worker industry and then the 1980 hotel worker strike that you're doing oral history work on right now. So maybe you want to talk about why you chose those two specific topics for the project?

00:54

FOO: When we talk about Asian American feminism, the work of Asian American women, one of the areas that isn't covered is labor organizing, union organizing. So I thought that that needs to be a part of our history also, and there's plenty of women, I'm sure you can interview about NAPAWF and reproductive justice, but there's only a handful, actually, of Asian American women, where labor history basically resides. So that's why I wanted to talk about labor organizing and Asian American women, Asian immigrant women over the last thirty years or so.

KWON: Oh, okay. How did you start your labor organizing work?

2:07

FOO: Well, how did I start? I myself was a garment worker at age 11. I worked in the garment factory with my mother in San Francisco Chinatown during my junior high school years and watched as women, who worked in sewing factories, basically had to struggle to survive. They worked six or seven days a week, ten to twelve hours a day at minimum wage. Many of them even on those salaries had to live in federal housing projects, and the plight of garment workers really goes back to the early, you know, the fifties for Chinese immigrant garment workers—the forties, the fifties. And so I grew up seeing this type of oppression in my own community—child labor, industrial home work—and thought about it through all those years, including high school, college, and [I] remember thinking about what is the solution to this? You know, even as I was in high school—

Oh, and actually in high school, one of the shops in Chinatown went on strike; it was one of the union shops. And I don't know if you've been through San Francisco Chinatown. You know those two main streets? There's Grant Avenue, and there's Stockton. Grant Avenue is the tourist strip, and Stockton is basically the community center. There was a garment factory on Stockton Street, and one day, as I'm riding home on the bus from high school, I look out the window, and there's this group of garment workers—ages forty, fifty, sixty—and they're picketing, you know? They're picketing their shop. And I could remember just the exhilaration, the feeling of finally immigrant workers are standing up for themselves, you know that, and a group of Chinese immigrant workers are standing up for themselves. And so for me, the unions became the solution; labor organizing became the solution. That nobody's going to give you your rights, you've got to take them for yourself. So that impression stayed throughout my life, basically. So even as a labor attorney, I've always practiced law as an organizer, as an attorney organizer more than just an attorney.

And I went through a couple of transitions before I actually became a labor organizer, including being a fashion designer. Because having learned to sew at age 11 and having actually designed and produced custom clothing throughout junior high school and high school—and this is mainly for rich hippies, and then I went off to fashion design school—that's where my artistic expression took its direction. But I do remember that ending, when one of my rich hippie customers said, You need to set up your own design house, and your own manufacturing company. And so he sent me through this [factory]—no, he sent me through this designer's shop. And the irony of it is, it's called the Margaret Rubel factory, or Margaret Rubel whatever, which doesn't exist anymore. But the irony of it was, it was her shop that the women were picketing in Chinatown.

KWON: No way.

FOO: (laughs) When I was sixteen.

6:40

KWON: No way. That's so funny.

FOO: It was really funny, so now I'm age eighteen or nineteen, and walking through her factory, right? And she's got a whole group of Chinese immigrant workers sewing away. Now, this was outside of Chinatown, so I have no idea what her wages and working conditions were because they weren't in Chinatown. But what I realized at age eighteen—no, maybe I was age nineteen. At age nineteen, I realized that if I opened my own design house, I would have to hire workers. I would have to pay them minimum wage and overtime, I would not abuse them, and then I thought, You know, I'm a kid. This is too much (laughs). I'm not doing this. And so I decided to—Oh, I think I left for Alaska at that point. I just went to Alaska to work in the salmon canneries.

KWON: Oh, wow.

7:43

FOO: I've always—I mean, you asked earlier, Why nature photography? I've always—from my earliest experiences out in nature, that basically was the place that I felt uncaged and the burdens of childhood lifting off of me. Because working in the garment factory at age eleven was because [we] had a father that abandoned us, my mom had six kids, and she relied on her kids to work with her to put food on the table and pay the rent and keep a roof over our heads. So as a kid, as a child, when I first experienced the woods and nature, it was the first place where I felt the claustrophobia lift, the burdens lift. And that's been a life long love of nature, you know, so I would backpack whenever I could backpack. I photographed throughout the times that I've backpacked. It wasn't until I was in my early forties that my photography became art, so anyway.

So back to your question about why labor organizing?

KWON: Oh, yeah, yeah.

FOO: Yeah, so that's the roots of it. It came from watching my mother, wanting to improve the lives of Asian immigrant workers and their children, and understanding that nobody's going to do it for them for us unless women organized themselves.

I came back from Alaska, and San Francisco State University—back then, San Francisco State College, which was in 1971—was recruiting students in the communities for the purpose of eventually getting them in to the four-year college. So it was the extension program that came into the community and recruited. By then I was active in the Chinatown community, in youth work and artwork. I got recruited into a one-year extension program. From there, we moved into four-year college, so I think, 1972, I started at San Francisco State University. Bypassed the SAT

[Scholastic Achievement Test], because we went through this extension program, and they were really implementing an affirmative action program to recruit people from the hood, to recruit minorities. Having come through the public school system in San Francisco and my high school, where nobody went to four-year colleges. I mean, maybe a small percentage of us. Everybody went off to two-year colleges or went off to work. I had no idea what the SAT was, anyway (laughs). So anyway, we bypassed the SAT and got into college, and it was in—and you probably remember the Third World Strike happened in 1968. So in the seventies—'71, '72—Ethnic Studies was just beginning. Asian American Studies was just beginning—

KWON: And you were at the right place, SFSU.

11:14

FOO: SFSU. At the right place. And so I got to help develop the courses, like the Chinese American community course, the Cantonese language course, and in particular, the Asian American women's course. It had been taught for one semester, I think, and I don't know if you know Pat Sumi, she's one of the early feminists from the 1970s. She taught the first Asian American women's course at San Francisco State, and she was a Marxist, so she taught it from a Marxist perspective. I mean, there were no reading materials, first of all, right? There was just no reading materials, period. And even Asian American literature at that point, the only thing that was written was probably Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* or something like that, and *No-no Boy*. You know the—

KWON: Yeah, yeah. The Japanese—

FOO: The Japanese American [book]. I think that was the only published work for us to read. There was nothing else. And so instructors and students at that time were writing their own reading materials and their own lectures. As a Marxist, Pat was teaching feminism from race, class, and gender analysis—the intersection of race, class, and gender—before anybody else was doing it, basically. Around the same time, bell hooks was probably writing her feminist theory. I remember delivering one of my first lectures on the triple oppression of Asian American women. So this is like 1972, 1973.

But it was that course that—from that course, I decided, What am I doing in college? I need to go back to organizing. Well, actually, I shouldn't say go back to organizing, I hadn't been organizing. I should go back into a garment factory and organize, and go back into a unionized garment factory.

Because at that point, the union shops throughout San Francisco were decent shops, paying living wages, [with] 35-hour-work weeks, not 40-hours. They actually achieved a 35-hour-work week with overtime pay and union protection from arbitrary firings and disciplines, et cetera. And

then they had a third of the Chinatown shops unionized—maybe not as much as a third, but a significant number of Chinatown shops unionized. But they were sweatshops, so they ignored the working conditions in the Chinatown shops. And the Chinatown shops that were unionized got health benefits, got pension, but the pension was so low that it didn't lift women out of poverty, even after they retired. My former mother in law actually worked in the union shop, which was how I discovered there were union shops in Chinatown, right? And she continued working in the union shop to be able to get her health and welfare benefits, you know, her medical coverage, and her pension. And I remember she worked her 10-hour days. She worked six days a week. She'd bring work home; she had an industrial sewing machine in her bedroom, and she'd be sewing after dinner. And this is supposed to be a union shop. So I decided—hang on a minute, okay? Turn off.

KWON: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

END OF FILE 1

FILE 2

KWON: All right.

FOO: So I decided that what I really needed to do was find a job in a union sewing factory, that I would work towards transforming that union into a fighting union, and that not only should all of—at that point, I was thinking the Chinatown shops need to be unionized, and it wasn't until after I joined the union that I realized that a third of it had already been unionized, but it still suffered under those appalling sweatshop conditions.

So in the last semester of my senior year at San Francisco State, I dropped out, and I went and found a job in a factory or a design house called Koret of California. I think that design, that brand doesn't exist anymore, but back then it was one of the few unionized manufacturers in San Francisco. And it had both what we call "inside shops and "outside shops." In the "inside shops," they had their own factory building and hired workers directly. And then they contracted out to sewing shops in Chinatown; those were the "outside shops." I can't remember how many outside shops they used, but the inside shop that I worked in was large. It had four floors, two floors of seamstresses—maybe a total of two hundred seamstresses, which is large, back in those days.

I got hired on first as a single-needle operator and then moved onto double-needle, and because I was so skilled, having learned since age 11, they just sort of put me in every single operation there was, wherever they needed me—which was not good for wages, since wages was based on piece rates and the only way you're going to be able to make any money on piece rates is to sew really fast in one operation, all the time, right? So there I was floating around the entire factory, not making a whole lot of money, but for the organizing purposes, it was perfect because then I got to know women in every single section. It was production line assembly of garments—

KWON: What exactly goes on between the women while you're like actually sewing? Is it silent? Do you talk or—

2:55

FOO: There's talking. Mostly people are concentrating on sewing as fast as they can, but there's a lot of socializing going on, also. In the Chinatown shops, they were sewing garments not assembly style but an entire garment.

KWON: Oh, by themselves.

FOO: By themselves, which makes it a much slower, less efficient process and quality control—you can't really do quality control very well, as opposed to assembly line and being able to move people from one section to another, depending on what their skills are.

So by the time I got there—I mean the count, say, a hundred seamstresses on the second floor—oh, maybe the third floor—on the third floor, where I worked, eighty percent of them are Chinese immigrants, and then the rest are Latina and African American women.

As I was saying, this assembly-line production, you had different people specializing in, say, sewing side seams, in setting zippers, in sewing waist bands. And the assembly line is organized so that you do the first part first, and then the bundle moves onto the next group and then to the next section. Each time a new style comes out, there's a big huge struggle for getting the highest piece rate for that new style, as possible. So long before I even got to the factory, the Chinese immigrant workers had already figured out how to pull slowdowns, so that they could get the highest piece rate they could. So let's say that [for] the side seam workers—a new style comes down. The time study engineer would come out with his clipboard and his stopwatch and stand over a woman, watch as she's sewing. But the entire section has slowed down to a snail's pace, sewing the side seam (laughs). It takes a lot of courage to do that when you got a white male engineer standing over you, right? And white managers walking around going, What the hell are you guys doing? They all, in solidarity, do this regularly, every time a new style comes up.

And the result is this bottleneck. The next section doesn't have work. They're sitting there, waiting, because of this bottleneck. The entire production line is disrupted when this happens. But the union contract guarantees you a minimum wage, a minimum hourly that you can't drop below, and so everybody knows, you know, it doesn't matter it's bottlenecked. We're not making maybe eight dollar an hour; we're making four dollars an hour, but it's okay. Eventually they'll settle on a piece rate, and everybody speeds up and makes up for whatever lost wages [from] the first couple of days (laughs).

KWON: Wow.

6:34

FOO: So I'm going, "Whoa. These women have already got it together." These were Toisan women, and some of them—a lot of them were Toisan women. And I don't know if you've run into a Toisan woman. [They're] tough as nails, you know, tough as nails (laughs). I've crossed a few of them and just was sorry I did.

But some of them had never been to a union meeting, had never seen the union contract, had never realized that every time union dues go up they have the right to vote on it—yes, up or down, you know? They had the right to vote on the new contract, that union leadership can't just impose a contract on them, and the union basically kept it that way to maintain control over the workforce, right? The health benefits were not the greatest, the pensions were not the greatest, there were arbitrary layoffs, seniority wasn't being recognized. So within the inside shops people could be disciplined, unjustly and the union shops, the union

business agents—and they're called business agents, they're the staff of the union that go into the shops, to handle grievances that can't be handled by a shop steward. Do you know what a shop steward is?

KWON: No.

8:26

FOO: In most unions, shop stewards are either elected or appointed, and they're the first line representative and advocates of workers. And so imagine whatever workplace you've worked, you elect a person who's going to be the advocate or the representative for the entire workforce, and every time there is a grievance, instead of you yourself going up to management to complain, you take your shop steward with you. Your shop steward has been, is supposedly trained by the union, have read the union contract, understand the terms of the contract, and is able to enforce the contract on the job. Like somebody didn't get paid her holiday pay, didn't get paid her vacation, or got laid off out of seniority order, first person that the worker would go to is the shop steward, and together, they go to management. And if on that level, it can't be resolved, then they bring in the union staff.

So I can't remember where I was going with this. Ah, I eventually became shop steward, but even before I became shop steward, I was actually already unofficially being the shop steward, because I was bilingual. And so I ended up translating for everybody and anybody that had a problem with management, and so I was in and out of the manager's office so often that they started targeting me. And so this is a period when from 8AM in the morning till four o'clock, when we punched out, I spoke Cantonese the entire day for three years, and by—Oh, I don't know, probably by six months into it, I started losing my English.

KWON: That happens. It does.

10:25

FOO: I'd go into the office to argue, and I go "Uhh." What happened to your English? How did you get so inarticulate? (laughs) And anyways, it was like the immersion into—One of the things that I decided to do was to bring workers to union meeting, when membership dues were going up, when contract negotiations began. I started bringing workers to the meetings, and I decided at one point, I needed to publish a in-house newsletter in Chinese for the workers to explain what union dues are, how they are adopted, what their rights are, and I think eventually I got my friends to translate the entire union contract into Chinese. So for the first time in, say, twenty, thirty years that the workers had been in that factory, they actually saw a union contract. And then there were elections for the executive board and the presidency. I had tried to pull together a rank and file slate to run—to take over the executive board, and what I discovered was that the most militant of the Chinese immigrant women workers couldn't speak enough English to function in that setting—union business was run in English—and the English-speaking Chinese immigrant workers

were not necessarily your most militant, and a lot of the time, they were using their English to curry favor with the bosses, you know? So you didn't want them in leadership either. Mostly, I was working alone in that union, and I hadn't been there more than three years to be able to run for office. And so I decided—and I had tried to find other women willing to be shop stewards to replace me, but wasn't able to do it for the reasons that I just explained about English speaking abilities. So I, at that point, decided [I] really wasn't making much progress and [was] not going to be able to transform this union.

Other friends of mine were working in the hotel union, in Local 2 in San Francisco. In fact, in the late seventies, early eighties—throughout the seventies—the new Left in this country began going back into factories, and for people of color, going back into factories meant we went back into the garment industry, went to the hotels, [and] went to the restaurants, because that's where people of color worked. African Americans went to the autoworker's union; white leftists went into the machinist and et cetera. But for people of color, we went to work among farmworkers, garment workers, hotel workers, restaurant workers. And Local 2, the hotel union, had been just seething with activity throughout the seventies. There were probably about five to six radical left groups in there, which made for interesting organizing, because of the factionalism between all these groups (laughs). Very intense factionalism. But when you've got that many—you know, you've got a quarter of cadres from all these different organizations spread out throughout the hotels, right? So in 1978, they actually managed to run a rank and file slate that got rid of the thirty-year bureaucracy. And then in 1980, six thousand hotel workers go on strike against thirty-five of the first class hotels. So a lot was happening in that union, and I decided I needed to shift. By myself, I'm not going to do much in the garment workers union, but I would be able to contribute in the hotel union.

13:20

My first job was as a maid, room cleaner, in the Hilton hotel, and then a couple of months after that, I moved over the St. Francis Hotel. Let me back up about the hotel union. The hotel union, before 1975, was five separate local unions. There was the Maids Union, the Dishwashers [Union], the Cooks [Union], the Bartenders [Union], the Waiters and Waitresses [Union]. All of them held separate union meetings. They were affiliated into a joint council, and that joint council was headed by a guy named Joe Belardi, who basically ruled all five locals with an iron hand. Well, the International was mob-ridden, the locals—the Vegas local definitely was mob. San Francisco wasn't entirely clear, but there were definitely mob-like figures in the staff, who talked and walked like mafia. I thought maybe they were just wannabe mafias wasn't entirely sure (laughs). But they were racist. White male racists, and they would go into the restaurants, and they'd say to a Chinese waiter, "Hey ricehead," you know? And of course, corrupt and not representing workers. So the back of the house workers, meaning the dishwashers, the bussers, the maids,

15:35

were treated with disrespect, were humiliated constantly. INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] was called in whenever a group of workers—particularly the Latina undocumented workers—filed grievances or complained, and the maids in particular were disrespected. But all of the activism was happening in the other locals, like the cooks, the waiters, the bartenders. There were activists, who would run for office and be defeated. The waiter/waitresses, a lot of them were in college, working as waiters and waitresses, and the bartenders were the highest paid, and the cooks were the next highest paid. And there were issues among all of them, but not enough—these were the highest paid in the industry, so not enough discontent to be able to overthrow leadership. And then in the lowest paid of the workforce, there never emerged those activist leaders, who could take over the their unions, for the same reason that I saw in the garment workers union—the most militant are not the most articulate or bilingual, even. And then the international union made the mistake of merging all five locals, and they thought they could control the San Francisco locals by merging all five. They didn't realize they were digging their own graves when they did that, right? If they analyzed the situation, they would've said, Bad idea to merge all these locals. Because all of a sudden, you had all these white activists in the higher paid unions merge with this really large group of discontented people of color workers. You put the two together all of a sudden you have the vote and the ability to run the union. That's what happened. So '78, they run a slate; the slate itself was almost all white except for one Chinese American. It wasn't [a] decisive victory; they did get rid of Belari, all the officers, but they won only half of the executive board, and half of the paid positions. But that victory alone changed the union completely and was the reason why Local 2 today is the most powerful union in San Francisco—maybe the Bay Area—with people of color in leadership, people of color on the executive board. And it was that union that changed the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations]'s position on undocumented workers and adopting a resolution to organize the undocumented.

So at any rate, the beginnings of it was 1975, 1978, and I moved over to the hotel union in October of '78, when all of that had already happened—the rank and file had taken over leadership of the union. Like I said, my first job was hotel maid at the Hilton, and that's when I discovered what the working conditions of hotel maids were, and [they were] just atrocious. Sweatshops within these first-class hotels, basically. Women who had so many rooms to clean a day, sixteen rooms in a day in an eight-hour shift, that they couldn't take their morning breaks, sometimes they worked through lunch, or went downstairs to the cafeteria and gulp down a lunch for ten minutes, skip their afternoon breaks, sometimes work overtime without pay, you know, particularly on days when everybody checked out [on your floor] or you had [a lot of] make-up rooms, where you had some particularly messy guests. There's just no

20:27

allowances for any of that. You're expected to clean sixteen rooms, no matter what shape your rooms are in. So I'd remember clocking in at eight and by two o'clock, I'm going, "Oh my god, I haven't gone to the bathroom yet. I haven't drunk any water yet." I'm getting nauseated. The older maids dealt with it by just bringing lunch along and eating up on the floors, so that they could finish their rooms. Maids were always in a bind, because you're given so little time to clean your rooms, but you had to not just change the beds, scrub the toilets, scrub the bathtub, vacuum, but you had to make sure everything was in the right order. You had any dust on chair arms or dust on the shade or whatever, you'd be written up. So it was just a lot of pressure. You had to take the shortcuts to be able to clean your rooms, but you couldn't slack on the details, otherwise you'd get written up. And if you get written up often enough, your floor gets taken from you. You no longer have the same floor every single day; you're a floater.

Maids were majority Filipina, and then [there was] a small number of Chinese immigrants, and larger groups of Latina and African American [women]. But the largest group was Filipina. Today, for some reason, hotel maids are primarily Chinese immigrant women. I'm not sure how that transition happened, but anyway, it did. But back in 1978 to [19]80, and onwards, they were primarily Filipina. And the discrimination back then, maids would try—and the Filipinas, many of them were professionals back in the Philippines, [but] just couldn't get positions as teachers and nurses, and so they worked as maids. They'd try to get out of that department by applying for cashiers' positions or waitresses' positions, and they'd get thrown back at them, Oh, you're just a maid. And maids for some reason, had to pay for their breakfast, lunch and dinners while the rest of the hotel—the cooks, the waiters, the waitresses—got free meals.

23:16

KWON: And they got paid more.

24:43

FOO: Right. And in the housekeeping departments, if a maid got sick, you had to bring in a doctor's notice, whereas the rest of the hotel wasn't required to do that. So the disrespect, the humiliation made it so that maids were pretty pissed and—you know, you had national pride going on, and they were convinced they were being treated like this because they were Filipinas. And the African American maids already knew what racism was, it was just Filipinas that were (laughs), How dare they treat us like this?

Yeah, so, in 1978, once the new union leadership took over, they hired some really militant business agents that they sent into the hotels, and the first hotel maids to fight against the rooms quotas was the Hyatt Regency maids, and they managed to get a maximum of fifteen rooms a day. After that, the St. Francis maids met and decided they were going to demand reductions in their rooms, but what they were going to do was basically pull a slowdown. They decided that they were no longer going to

stop taking their breaks, because the union contract said fifteen minute breaks in the morning, half an hour lunch, fifteen minute break in the afternoon. So over a hundred maids all decided at ten o'clock, which is the designated time for breaks, that they'd take their breaks. All of a sudden the entire cafeteria is full of women that never were down there at ten o'clock. And they did that for lunch, and they did that in the afternoon, and that meant hundreds of rooms left unclean at the end of the day. And they did that for two weeks running. One maid was fired, five were suspended, hundreds of warning notice [were] issued. Eventually the hotel intimidated a lot of the maids to going back to not taking their breaks, but enough maids held out that the hotel asked for expedited arbitration.

So I got hired at the time that the slowdown was happening, right in the middle of this slowdown, and so we ended up with every other worker in the—all of management having to figure out how to clean these rooms, and you'd have five managers in a room, cleaning a room that one maid used to do, right? You had the general manager carrying a bucket, trying to clean rooms. But I think what—the solidarity remained through that period, and it had a lot to do with national pride. I mean, the Filipinas had elected two shop stewards, and the two of them just whipped everybody in line, which is peer pressure. And the same with the Latina maids. I'm not sure what the African American maids did, but those two groups [Filipina and Latina maids], in particular, were the backbones of this. The only group that probably didn't go along were the Samoan maids, and they were more pro-management. By the time of the strike, that flipped, but—

Anyways, that was the St. Francis Hotel. And we ended up in very long arbitration and got a decision that just overwhelmed us, because not only did the arbitrator put a cap on the room quotas—no more than fifteen a day. Actually, I think she dropped it to fourteen, I can't remember. I think she dropped it to fourteen a day—and then you could even drop rooms if you had more than eight checkouts in a day, if they sent you to two different floors, you know, all kinds of different reasons to drop rooms. And what we got at the Saint Francis became sort of the rallying cry for all the other maids in all the other hotels, and that was one of the issues of the 1980 strike.

So at any rate, the International decides to put the local into trusteeship, because as I explained earlier, the rank and file slate captured only half of the executive board and half of the union paid staff. And so every union meeting, every executive board meeting, was disrupted by the Old Guard, and that was the excuse for the International to send a trustee in—take over the local. Lawsuit was filed. Eventually, the trusteeship was overturned and we had new elections. The rank and file slate from 1978 had fallen apart [due to] splits and factionalisms, and one of the activists from that old slate runs for the presidency along with other International selected candidates, so basically switch sides, and he wins. He wins the '79 elections.

27:16

But so much has changed in this union that you can no longer go back to the old days, and so they actually send a trustee who's a progressive, Vincent Sirabella, who then comes up with this ten-point platform calling for everything we called for. Rank and file negotiating committee, elected shop steward system, you know? And we figure this guy wants the presidency. After the trusteeship is over, he's going to run. And he's progressive! And so he's one of their best organizers, they send him out here to control the local. He hates us. We hate him (laughs). In any other situation, he would be an ally, but International sends him in. So for the first time in thirty years, there's an opportunity to go on strike. For thirty years, there are these sell-out contracts, one after another, and—did we get rid of him yet? I can't remember.

Anyways, we end up in elections for rank and file negotiating committee, representing all the classifications—maids, dishwashers, waiters/waitresses—and so we ended up with this rank and file negotiating committee of maybe twenty? Probably more than twenty people. And I'm elected as a representative for the maids, representing city-wide, the maids. There's three of us. We basically have to rewrite the whole contract, because it's been so weakened after all these years, and of course, half the people on the negotiating committee are radicals and so we come up with these—and nobody's negotiated a contract before, and nobody has any experience of negotiating a contract (laughs). Our demand was a 68 percent raise increase for the first year for the lowest paid workers and 38 percent raise for the highest paid workers, the higher paid workers—at which point, since I've been in the hotel union [and] my other friends have been in other unions, I'm thinking, Are you guys insane? (laughs)

KWON: (laughs) 68 percent?!

32:55

FOO: Are you insane? The hotels are going to the media. But it ended up not being an issue, because we were such low paid workers that if you raised it [by] 68 percent, it was still, you know. So all of us inexperienced rank and file negotiators had to then turn to rely on the trustee, or the former trustee, who continued as the chief negotiator, because he's negotiated for thirty years, right? So we're all waiting for him to sell us out, in some way or other (laughs). It was just this love-hate relationship. He was the most experienced negotiator, he was aggressive, he's everybody that you'd want on your side, except you know any minute he's going to screw us up. He's going to sell us out. At any rate, so we negotiate, and we finally take a vote for the workers to give us, the negotiating committee, strike authorization so that you don't have to go back and put it back before the membership whether or not to go on strike. The negotiating committee decides if we reach a stalemate, we can pull everybody out on strike. And the vote was something like overwhelming. I can't remember. Oh, actually I do. I was reading—I'll give you a link to this at some point. At the end

of 1981, I wrote up the hotel experience when it was still fresh in my mind, and it got published in one of *The Yellow Journals*, Asian American journals. I think the first issue or second issue. And the vote was 2,845 to 192 for strike authorization. I mean, this was—you couldn't keep these workers from going on strike. They would've been disappointed if we entered into a settlement agreement because they were so pissed. They were so pissed at management for the way they'd been treated all these years, right? They wanted to go on strike.

And the morning of the strike, at the St. Francis Hotel, we're passing out the picket signs, and people are picketing. We selectively pull ten hotels out, the most prepared [hotels]. Across the street was the smaller hotel, the Steward hotel, the maids showed up for work, looked at our picket lines and says, We're not going to work. We want picket signs. This is how badly people wanted to strike back at the management. And the Sheraton Palace wasn't one of the hotels we selected, but it was one of the larger hotels on Market Street, and the workers there just did a wildcat, they said, We're not going to work. You didn't select us, but we refuse to go to work. We're throwing up our own picket line. So we ended up with—well, and then the Hotel Employers Association had an agreement between them that if any hotel was struck, everybody else was going to lock out workers. So the Association basically forced all the other hotels to lock out their workforce. So we ended up with 6,000 workers on strike against 35 of the hotels and the strike lasted for about twenty-seven days. Twenty-seven days is a long time to be on strike for any group of workers. But especially for this group of workers, a lot of whom, even working a full forty-hour week, made so little that they were eligible for food stamps, so they didn't have any cushions to fall back on—unlike your autoworkers or your machinists who might own a camper to go camping or a boat to go fishing, right? These workers were really scraping bottom. I think we managed to get unemployment for everybody who was locked out, and we managed to get food stamps for people. There was a department in the union that was working on making sure people got what the safety net provided.

The backbone of the strike were the Filipina maids and the Latina and the African Americans. And when you see pictures of the picket lines, you see all these women on the picket lines. The day shift was the maids, and then the evening shift would be waiters. You know, the people kind of replicated the shifts that they worked—

KWON: Mmm. That they usually take. Yeah.

37:43

FOO: Yeah. There were five Holiday Inns in the city, and they entered into an agreement with the union—into a “me too” agreement basically that whatever contract was settled on, they would adopt. They basically wanted—it was neutrality, so it was not necessary to strike their hotels, and the Chinese maids that worked in the Holiday Inns after work would

come down to the picket lines. And at one point, I was going, “Okay. Where are all the guys? Where are they?” I sort of walk into the bars in downtown San Francisco, and there they were, hanging out at the bars.

KWON: What?!

38:28

FOO: At any rate, after 27 days of strike—or actually a little less than that. Maybe 20 days, 25 days—the International just decided enough is enough, you guys got enough, and it’s time to end this strike. And so they took the negotiations and moved it to Los Angeles, away from the rank and file negotiating committee. So the International flies into LA. The trustee and our local union president all go to LA. They negotiate with the hotel employers, and they reach a settlement. The settlement is basically everything that we rejected when we went on strike. We already rejected all of that, we already achieved it and rejected it. And so they came back and put it before the rank and file negotiating committee. We voted it down 2 to 1, but they brought it to the union membership anyway for ratification. And by three weeks, people were really hurting and wanting to go back to work.

They had the ratification vote in Kezar Stadium in Golden Gate Park, and it was—I have to find the vote. I’ll find the number for you, but what they basically did was didn’t give the rank and file committee any time to explain why they should vote No on this contract and lied about what they actually got. So the workers ratified the contract, and it was a pretty large margin. Let me see if I can find it for you, in terms of—oh, it was 1,823 for and 524 against. People wanted to go back to work.

KWON: Right.

40:52

FOO: I remember that vote. The Kezar Stadium is this oval stadium, you know, with the benches, and so you had over 2,000 workers sitting on the seats. The St. Francis workers that I had sat with—and they were mostly the maids, the Filipina maids, the Latina maids—they started chanting, “No, no, no!” And then this response got echoed back, “Yes, yes, yes!” by the rest of the stadium (laughs). And then across from us, the Hyatt Regency workers would start, “No, no, no!” And the resounding, “Yes, yes, yes!” And then the Fairmont workers would start a “No, no, no!” And the resounding, “Yes, yes, yes!” which at that point, I figured, we lost. We’ve already lost. But [in] those three hotels in particular the workers were willing to hold out and continue the strike, because they trusted the rank and file leadership more than they trusted the union officers. Those were the most organized hotels. But we went down—but the members were ready to go back to work.

And in retrospect, when we look at it—the people who were activists at that point, today they say, Well, that strike needed to end. We had no exit plan. We had no idea how to end the strike. And I don’t know. Many

of the activists from that strike became business agents; they became heads of unions, they've negotiated many contracts since, and they're probably right (laughs). At any rate, what we did achieve—what we achieved before we went on strike was the highest wages of any hotel workers in the country—higher than Vegas and New York and Los Angeles—affirmative action language, seniority language, a whole slew of things that made our contract, one of the strongest among union contracts actually, and it transformed the union. Like I said, it's the most powerful union in San Francisco, and it's kind of sparked a movement in the rest of the country. Los Angeles workers almost got rid of their incumbent bureaucracy, and their slogan was, San Francisco Wages for LA Workers, so it sparked this movement. And the rank and file stayed active, and like I said, it was Local 2 that brought resolution to the AFL-CIO on undocumented workers, which changed positions of the AFL-CIO and the other international unions.

I wanted to talk about the strike because of the significance of it. The Asian immigrant women that were the backbone of the strike, many of the activists and leaders were Asian American women, like Patricia Lee, Pam Tao Lee, Sin Yee Poon, all of whom later became heads of unions. And when it came to labor organizing, organizing among Asian American women, mostly leadership were Asian women activists. So anyways, that's the hotel industry. I don't know if you have any questions about this.

KWON:

Yeah, I'm really interested in the inter-ethnic solidarity, because you were talking about Filipino women [and how] they did it for their national pride reasons. How did they connect with the Latina women and the African American women?

44:52

FOO:

The Latinas were suffering in the same way that the Filipinas were. Because the largest group of workers were Filipina, they elected two Filipina maids. But there was leadership that percolated up among Latina maids also and that working relationship [between Latina and Filipina maids] was good, and there was an African American maid that was active. And so there was just mutual respect and solidarity among all these groups. I was saying that the only group of workers was—ethnic group, Samoan maids, that wasn't always with the rest of the maids. And I really don't know what the history of that is and why that is, until one of the younger Samoan maids got disciplined for something that all the other maids thought was unfair. As shop steward, I actually went in with her to management to challenge the warning that she got and may have been able to remove the written warning from her files, and it was at that point, that the entire group of Samoan maids shifted and flipped and came over to our side, and they were on the picket lines with us. And it was just a matter of time. It was a matter of time before the Samoan maids actually figured out whose side they were on, and all it took was one incident like that when

one of them was treated unfairly and the rest of the maids stood behind them. So it was one of the poignant moments that made a difference in our strike.

I think over 90% of the hotel workers walked. The only people who stayed inside were probably some of the cooks, and I don't know if the bartenders stayed inside. I mean, all the first class hotels had to close their dining rooms, and they had minimum service, like sandwiches or whatever. You know, so it was an amazing solidarity in that strike. They brought in scabs from different hotels from Texas and Florida, and they just flew them in and they lived in the hotel. They were advertising it [the hotel jobs as replacements] in the African American community, so all these young black women would cross the line, and we'd stand there and try to convince them not to cross the line. Sometimes it worked—a lot of times it worked, or they get hired and they realize how hard the job was and how oppressive it was, and they'd quit, right? Yeah, so anyway, did you have any other questions?

47:10

KWON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I have a ton of questions. I was also interested in what kind of health hazards the maids went through? I know my mother's friend, she used to work in the hotel industry, and she complained a lot about the chemicals that she had to use, and then also just the physical strain of having to change the bed sheets all the time?

48:17

FOO: Right. Bending over all the time. Yeah, so lower back injury, lifting heavy mattresses to be able to do those corners that you have to do. In the later years, Pam Tao Lee, who is an occupational safety and health person, was working with the hotels and the union to address those problems of maids having to stand on bathtub rims to be able to change curtains—and recent contract language has to do with the lifting of beds. The chemicals—you know, we never conducted studies, and so I am not clear. I'm sure Pam knows though, what the conditions in the—what the occupational issues were in the hotels. But when I was there, we were dealing with bread and butter issues, and until those were dealt with, everything else got put off. I'm sure they got around to occupational safety and health type issues.

KWON: And then you were also talking about a lot of women leadership in the unions. Where did that come from? Why was it so gendered?

50:02

FOO: Why was it so gendered? Well, the garment union is gendered because almost 100 percent of the seamstresses are women, right? And I should say—I was saying that for leftists to go back to work with their people in factories, it meant farmworkers, garment workers, hotel—and garment workers, of course, would be—you know, one group sent in someone who was a cutter, but it was primarily—you had to be a woman to work in a workforce of women. And so Katie Quan was born and raised in San Francisco, moved to New York, and worked in the New York union

Chinatown shops, and became staff of that union and eventually got sent back to San Francisco to head up the union that I was a member of. And May Chin, same thing. I don't know if May started as a garment worker in a factory, but she eventually ended up being the head of Local 23, 25 in New York City, one of the largest locals in the country. So that's understandable for the garment industry, why the leaders are women.

In the hotel industry, it's because of the large back of the house workforce, and the housekeeping department being such a large part. Probably half the union is housekeepers, and so to be effectively an organizer among housekeepers, you have to be a woman. So Sin Yee Poon, Patricia Lee, myself went to work as housekeepers, and all of us eventually rose in ranks within the union movement—not me because I left and became an attorney, but you know, the others. There were of course, people of color leaders in the Dishwashers Union, the Bussers [Union], but yeah, so the decision—Sin Yee was at UC [University of California,] Berkeley, was a UC Berkeley graduate, Patricia was a UC Davis graduate, I was barely a graduate at San Francisco State University, so we went back to work with working women and stayed in the labor movement in some form another and rose to leadership. Josie Camacho is now the head of the Alameda Central Labor Council, but she came through the ranks in the SEIU [Service Employees International Union]. I think she was a nurse's organizer. Yeah, so Asian American women went into those industries that were predominantly women and rose in the ranks.

KWON: So I guess the better question would actually be, Why is there such a gendered oppression of those specific industries, like what we consider domestic work or women's work of [the] garment industry, maids, housekeepers?

53:43

FOO: Oh, I'm sure it's for the same reason that the secretarial pool used to be unorganized and low-paid. They're gendered industries, and because it's women working in those industries, you end up with the excuse to pay them lower wages. And because of the myth that women are difficult to organize, you end up in that situation. Now, I think San Francisco housekeepers make pretty good wages now compared to others, but for industries as profitable as the hotel and garment—why did the disparities continue? It's [that] we live in a sexist society, and it permeates every level of the society, including the work. You know, the women in the union shops, in the late seventies and eighties, actually made more than their husbands, under union contract. They were able to move into the middle class. Most of the women working on my floor owned their own homes, and it's because of the wages that they made. So when you have a strong union that's fighting for you, you actually make decent wages. And I don't know what the wages of hotel maids are these days, but it's probably pretty good. Good enough—high enough for them to be in the

middle class, and not in among the working poor. It's still not what manufacturers' wages are, like autoworkers and machinists, but like I said, it's just the sexist nature of the society.

KWON: And then also I was wondering if there was any conflict between the workers themselves who had been there for a while and also new imported, possibly undocumented workers, especially if you're doing piece rate. You're able to exploit undocumented workers more.

56:12

FOO: Right, right. You know, not for San Francisco Bay Area, for New York, yes. But not for San Francisco Bay Area. At a certain point, the [San Francisco] Chinatown industry disappeared. And this was the 1990s, when I was at the Asian Law Caucus, Katie Quan took over as head of the garment workers union, and Sweatshop Watch was formed. That was a period where through multiple-prong strategy we actually manage to clean up the industry, so that people were at least making minimum wage, a lot of them started being paid overtime, and the industry started moving to Los Angeles, and moving to Utah, and moving to Mexico. And then eventually the World Trade Organization and one of the international trade agreements got rid of quotas so that there can be unlimited amounts of imports that can come into this country. And that wiped out the industry, basically wiped out the San Francisco industry. Oh, I was saying earlier that Chinatown basically—the industry disappeared, and it's because all the mom-and-pop shops in Chinatown couldn't withstand all the scrutiny by government agencies, by our lawsuits, by our organizing, that they closed down. But the workers moved to the larger factories in the outer Mission, in other parts of the city, you know, factories that were now fifty workers, a hundred workers, instead of just ten workers in a factory sewing an entire garment, [their] quality being very low. Workers never lost their jobs by the closing down of the factories, they just moved—they just found work in the larger factories, which meant they actually ended up with higher wages. Because when you have more efficient production line, assembly line methods of assembling garments, you're just going to be making more money. But even those outer Mission district shops started closing down and moving South, when we had our successes in cleaning up the industry. This is an industry that basically runs away. You unionize a shop; they close it and move. I forgot how I got on that track.

Oh, you were talking about new groupings coming in. So New York is an example of the Fuzhounese immigrants that are smuggled in. You remember that huge tanker that got grounded in somewhere in New York, and all these immigrants started fleeing.

KWON: Oh, I know. I don't know what it's called though.

FOO: Yeah, I can't remember but—

KWON: Yeah, I know the incident.

FOO: So what you have is, in the nineties, snakeheads that are smuggling workers in, they're indebted to these snakeheads in twenty thousand, thirty thousand [dollars]. And these workers will take any job at any wages, and so it basically lowered the standards of the New York garment shops to a point where they were back in the atrocious 1920s type of situation, where workers are at the factory before dawn, they're working through the night, they're sleeping on the factory floor to be able to finish bringing in the work on time. The Chinese immigrant workers, who had been working there for years and years, have seen their wages drop because of that. So I'm not sure what is left of the New York industry, given the fact that probably 90 percent of garment sold in this country are now made overseas. Whereas in the nineties, maybe 60 percent was made overseas and 40 percent was made here.

KWON: I'm interested in the movement of the industry overseas as well. Because my friend does organizing with USAS, the United Students Against Sweatshops, and she travels—or she's going to Bangladesh for the—

1:01:04

FOO: The fire.

KWON: the factory—yeah, the factory fire. But I was wondering if there was any transnational organizing or if that's a potential or if that could be powerful or if local organizing is more efficient.

FOO: There's no local organizing anymore because the industry has been decimated. Yeah, so even Sweatshop Watch folded a couple years back. Yeah, unfortunately, Sweatshop Watch didn't survive the transition of the old leadership, the older leadership leaving and moving on. I left Asian Law Caucus, Katie left the union. And then the transition that needed to be made to deal with an industry that was going to be decimated. It got harder and harder for organizations to get funding to continue the work because it was just endless; it was just a bottomless pit, trying to clean up the industry. So a lot of the national organizations that focused on garment workers overseas no longer do that work. Yeah, that's the difficulty of it. And USAS can continue doing the work because of the logoed apparels and baseball caps and this and that, that's made overseas, and they have direct contact with—But just about every group that did garment organizing no longer does it today. Yeah, so that's the sad part about it, and the industry having gone into major decline. Yeah.

KWON: I also wanted to talk to you a little bit about your interviews that you're doing with the 1980s hotel workers. Why did you decide to do them, and what were some of the stories that you were able to hear?

1:03:16

FOO: Another graduate student actually started the process of interviewing people who were involved in the 1980 strike, and he interviewed me. And then he graduated and got a job at one of the community colleges and stopped the interviewing process. And so I thought, This is a period that really needs to be documented, and I've been wanting to write book number three, so I decided, Well let's pick up where he left off and start interviews. Problem is people's memories, from thirty years ago, and some people are pretty old now, they're in their eighties, I mean— Actually what prompted it was one of the dishwasher activists died last year. I've been meaning to talk to him for a couple years now, and I realized if I don't start these interviews now, there aren't going to be many of us left. People will have passed away, they would be in their eighties and no longer wanting to talk to you. I did start the process by contacting all these activists, many of whom had such bad [negative] memories of what happened that they don't want to talk to me. It's not easy.

KWON: Yeah, I mean I was surprised when you pulled out *The Yellow Journal* and then your notes. And then your memory's so crisp, and you're like, Oh, this date or this number of people. Even when the Asian American activists that I'm interviewing—and they're in their forties, and they're talking about ten years ago. They don't remember.

1:04:58

FOO: Right. Fortunately—So to go to law school, I had to go back and get my B.A. You just can't go waltzing off to law school without a B.A.

KWON: (laughs) Unfortunately.

FOO: I had no idea. Then I found out, Oh, you got to have your B.A.

KWON: Bachelors. Yeah.

FOO: So in '81, I think, I went back. I stopped working at the St. Francis and went back to get my B.A. I had one more semester worth of work to do. I think I enrolled in one of the Asian American Studies independent projects course, and I wrote, in December 1981, what I've been telling you. And that's why I've got the numbers. Now, if I hadn't written this—I probably would still have the numbers in my notes somewhere, but the details of that period is here, basically, in this article. So I'll send you the electronic copy or a link to it. It's got—and I actually—so before you came, I sort of reviewed it refreshed my memory, and I've been reviewing it anyway to—

KWON: The project.

FOO: Yeah, to do the interviews. Yeah. So that's why I still have such a crisp memory of it, as you say. Without these, it would be very vague.

KWON: Yeah. What kind of stories—I know it's going to be published in your book, and I don't want to steal material from it—but if you could give us a sneak peek of what kind of stories you've collected so far?

1:06:48

FOO: You mean stories from other people?

KWON: Yeah, the interviews.

FOO: Well, there's only been five interviews that have been done, so far. And I've sort of put it aside just because so many people have said, No. But I'm thinking of people who have said, Yes, and so I'll be picking it up then. What I really wanted to know from them is the period before the elections, the period when there were five locals, what were the experiences of workers in those locals? And then people's memories of the negotiating committee, their memories of the strike, and what their role was in it, those were the details that I wanted to document. They're being archived at the San Francisco State University Labor Archives. So what you're doing in interviewing and putting together a collection to give to Smith [College], I'm doing to give to San Francisco State University, if I can get anybody to cooperate (laugh).

KWON: Yeah, maybe I'll include a link for it, once you get it archived.

FOO: Right. Yeah, and I was working with two other people, and they just haven't been able to come through with—I actually had an interview set up with this maid from the St. Francis Hotel, except she's got major diabetes and ended up going into surgery on the day that I was going to interview her. So this is what I'm dealing with, right? People in their sixties, seventies, and eighties, who rather not talk about that period, but now that I've sort of re-read the stuff, I think I'll start the process again. I mean, there are people who are now attorneys that were dishwashers, and I just need to go and interview them.

KWON: Let's see. Yeah, well that's all the questions I have for the topics. I was also wondering if you could talk about how you transitioned that work eventually to law school, because I know you were starting on that.

1:09:07

FOO: So after the 1980 hotel strike, I was completely burnt out. You know, you work manual labor five days a week, and then you're an activist the rest of the time, and an activist is basically evenings, weekends. So the combination of manual labor and the stresses of organizing, especially being on the negotiating committee and especially when there's so much factionalism going on in the union, I just decided, I need to find another way of advocating for workers and organizing workers. So I watched the attorneys during the maids' arbitration, and I watched them during

contract negotiations. And I decided, Well I can do this. That's something I can do.

KWON:

Yeah.

1:10:14

FOO:

Except when I first thought about it, I thought about becoming a paralegal before becoming an attorney, because of that confidence thing. You know, having been educated in the public school system, having gotten into San Francisco State, not through the regular route but through the recruitment, I still didn't have that confidence level as to whether I could even make it through law school. So I was thinking, Well, I'll just become a paralegal first, until one of the union attorneys said, "No, you can go to law school. You can get into law school." And that was the encouragement I needed, so I went to law school and I just decided, This is going to be a three-year reprieve from what I've been doing for the last six years. And that was what it was, and it was a three-year reprieve. And what I discovered in law school was my professors maybe graduated from the Ivy League schools and went from that to teaching, without actually having practiced law, and having enforced contracts [or] written contracts. I had no respect for my contracts teacher (laughs).

KWON:

I'm sure you probably knew more about it than he did.

1:11:32

FOO:

Right. I got so pissed at him at one point that I just decided, I'm not showing up for classes anymore. You don't know what you're talking about. And I went over to New College [of California] and sat in on their contracts course, ~~who~~ [which] had a really great instructor that I could have a back-and-forth with. And then I took the final exam [in the original class] and passed the contracts course. I just disappeared from—at any rate, so I had a great time in law school, and it was really hard work. I was working as hard as everybody else, but I had a great time because of the back-and-forth that I was having with my professors. Having worked for—well, let's see, '82, I go to law school. '68, I graduated from high school. So in that whatever that period of fourteen years, I've worked all that time, and have been an organizer—labor organizer—community organizer. So going to law school, as somebody who's had all kinds of life and work experience behind them, meant I could get a whole lot more out of law school than most law students, and actually enjoy law school (laughs).

I was talking about that confidence thing. I had no idea how I was going to do in law school, and the whole summer before going to law school, I just read everything I could read, and every word that I came across that I didn't understand, I looked up in the dictionary instead of skipping over and figuring the gist of it in the context of the sentence. I figured I better build my vocabulary, and the first time that I realized that my analytical abilities were superior to a lot of other peoples' was this

legal research and writing course, where I was vying for the top position with this white male whose father was a judge brother was an attorney—

KWON: Of course.

1:13:48

FOO: He's a journalist, right? And I'm vying for number one, me coming from the ghetto, with this private-school-educated guy, whose father's a judge. And I think I studied with him two times, and we stopped because he's so competitive, which is when I realized you know my analytical abilities is sharper than this guy's so—

KWON: You don't need him.

FOO: At any rate—no, it was competitive. He was uncomfortable. He was uncomfortable, so we just sort of ended the studying together part.

At the end of the first year of law school, I went and clerked at the Asian Law Caucus, and at that point, they were trying to do impact litigation on garment worker issues. When I graduated, they didn't have a position, and it wasn't until 1992 that the attorney that was the employment labor attorney finally left. I had been working for five years in the union law firm, representing unions and pension trust funds and health and welfare trust funds. Then I moved over to the Asian Law Caucus and represented workers in sweatshop industries for the next nine years, I guess. Nine years till—or eight years until I left the Caucus in 2000. So then after that was when I wrote the Asian American women's book and was involved with Peggy Saika in a book tour of the book, funded by the Ford Foundation, and which eventually led to the funding of AAPIP [Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy] and the National Gender & Equity Campaign, which you will be interviewing Peggy about.

KWON: You just skipped over like twelve years or something. I want to know more about your time at Asian Law Caucus. You said you were like a community organizer attorney?

1:16:04

FOO: Right.

KWON: So how was your approach different than the other attorneys?

FOO: Okay. How much time do you have? Because this is a very long—

KWON: We've hit an hour and a half. If you want to do like a quick—

FOO: I can do a quick one.

KWON: Okay.

FOO: So we developed a multi-prong approach to our labor work, actually to all of our work. Asian Law Caucus had four areas of focus: employment labor, tenant organizing, immigration, and I can't remember what the fourth one was. But anyways, so all of it—and it wasn't just litigation that we engaged in we engaged in that—impact litigation—and impact litigation means making change through the judicial system, pushing the boundaries of the law to protect tenants or workers or immigrants.

We engaged in legislative advocacy. So what we couldn't do by litigation, we would draft bills and lobby for their passage and build campaigns to push through the bills. We engaged in education of our community, and so we had community workers and paralegals that were doing presentations in newcomer agencies and other non-profits on a regular basis. You know, they would do know your rights, workers rights, immigrant rights, tenant rights. So Asian Law Caucus was very integrated in our communities—yeah, in our communities in that way. We engaged in campaigns and organizing. For instance, groups of restaurant workers that came, who were fired, who hadn't been paid minimum wage or overtime, we would say, You can file a law suit. Might take you three years. You could throw up a picket line, and if you'd like to throw up a picket line, we'll help you organize it, if you—you know, da da da. And then we formed Sweatshop Watch. We always did coalition work—coalitions of other low-wage workers, women's rights groups, immigrant rights groups, around things like raising the minimum wage, protecting overtime. We have an 8-hour day in California, not just a 40-hour-work week but an 8-hour day, which the Republicans are constantly attacking, and so we constantly have to defend it, right? So all these ad hoc coalitions would form, and eventually we formed Sweatshop Watch as the statewide coalition to do the advocacy work that each of the individual organizations can't do alone. So that's the nature of the Law Caucus's work.

KWON: And Peggy Saika worked there? Is that how you got to know her?

1:19:41

FOO: We covered different periods. She was coming in as the Executive Director in 1983 or '84, and I was working as a law clerk in '83 at the Asian Law Caucus. So I met her at one meeting in '83, and I think she might've started in '84, at the beginning of '84. So we didn't overlap. We just—I became an attorney by the time she left. So we actually didn't work together until the women's project, until the writing of the book [*Asian American Women*] and the funding that we got from the Ford Foundation.

KWON: Yeah, so I read the intro in your book. There was like a little information about that, but how were you chosen to write the book, and why did Ford Foundation decide to fund it?

1:20:38

FOO: So I'm going to give you this briefly, because Peggy is probably going to give you more detail.

KWON: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

FOO: I was leaving the Caucus in 2000. The Ford Foundation just hired an African-American program officer for the women's portfolio.

KWON: Oh, she was African Amer—she was a woman of color.

FOO: Yeah, she was a woman of color, she was a voting rights attorney that worked in San Francisco. She had since moved to Mississippi and then into New York. She's a friend of mine, and when she—this is Barbara Phillips, and when she took over the women's portfolio, she realized that no women of color organization had ever been funded from the women's portfolio—might have been funded from other parts of Ford Foundation, but not the women's portfolio, and if there was any funding, it was to two very small local groups. All the money went to the D.C. Beltway large organizations, large feminist organizations. She wanted to turn that situation around, but she had to understand the issues in each of the women of color communities. And so she was going to ask different women to write reports for her—issues and concerns of women in their communities: African American, Latino/a, Native American, Asian American. And I think she probably started with Asian American just because she knew me, and it was sort of the perfect timing, because I was leaving the Caucus and so I agreed to do it. And what I thought was going to be like a three-month process of interviewing, gathering papers, and writing a report, ended up being a nine-month research and writing project. And the main reason for that was I was under the mistaken belief that all the activists in the field had been regularly writing papers, you know, white papers, maybe publishing and all I had to do was gather up all those, interview them, review them, and write it (laughs).

KWON: That's what I thought I was going to do for my senior project—until I only found your book.

1:23:11

FOO: Right. Then I realized nobody's written anything, and I said, "How could this be? You got to write, and you got to garner all your facts and statistics to present to funders when you write your papers to foundations. If you do any kind of legislative advocacy, you have to pull your facts and figures together to be able to persuade a legislator." And well, no. Everybody's been active being an activist, and nobody's written anything. And the only reason I've written as much as I've written is because—you know, I published in the Yale Law journal, I have to write court briefs and garner the facts, right? So there was no research I had to do for the garment

industry; it already had been written. But that's not the same in reproductive justice or domestic violence or any of the other [issue areas], so then it ended up being this six-month effort—no, nine-month effort to do the research and the writing.

I, having been a labor activist for thirty years, really did not understand any of the other issue areas, you know, reproductive justice, domestic violence, or welfare reform and its impact on Asian American women. And so I was appalled at what I was finding, and I'm going, "My God. If I have been active in this community for so long, and I'm ignorant about all these issues, that means every other community organization does not understand much beyond their special area of expertise." And so the ways that Asian American women are oppressed are not even understood by our communities. So I decided, I'm not writing this for Barbara anymore. I'm writing this for my community.

The Ford Foundation will give you ten thousand dollars, and you turn in a ten-page paper to them. It's like. . .

KWON:

What?!

1:25:18

FOO:

Yeah, and they ask an academic to write something, and they'll give you ten thousand [dollars]. So I ended up writing this one-hundred-page report for her. I didn't expect it; she didn't expect it. But it's something that when I decided that it wasn't just Barbara I'm writing this for, it's the community I'm writing this for, it ended up being this one-hundred page report that she was just blown away by. I had a meeting with other program officers at the Ford Foundation, because before we finalized it, we asked some of the program officers to review it. We brought all the Asian American activists that I had interviewed to the meeting at the Ford Foundation to critique it before we finalized it.

Eventually, at one of the meetings, one of the program officers said, "This needs to be published as a book," and so Ford Foundation published it as a book and then they—And in all those discussions, the question was, How do you rebuild an Asian American women's movement? One of the program officers suggested a book tour and a development of an action plan—a plan for a five-year initiative on rebuilding the Asian American women's movement. They decided to fund that. So for one year, we got funding for me to do the book tour, traveling around eight states, the states with the largest Asian American populations, and interviewing women just to get a feel for the state of the Asian American women's movement. And it's based on that work that Ford Foundation then funded the National Gender & Equity Campaign.

I had moved onto something else. Because by 2004, when Bush was up for reelection, I just decided, I'm going to spend all of 2004 getting this man out of office (laughs).

KWON:

I cringed. I was like, "Urg. 2004."

1:27:34

FOO: So this is what I did. I ended up at the AFL-CIO in D.C. from April until December, heading up their national Voting Rights Protection Program. They needed an attorney organizer, so the general counsel at the AFL called and said—because I emailed him and said, “I want to get George Bush out of office. Pass along any job descriptions/announcements that you come across.” And he emails back, “Would you like to head up the national Voter Rights Program for the AFL-CIO?” “Sure. I’d love to.” (laughs). So anyway, that’s—you know.

And I did that in 2008 and by 2012, I said, “No. You need an African American to head up this program, because voting rights suppression takes place primarily in the African American communities. And I am getting tired of dealing with the African American trade union leaders that are unfriendly, because you got an Asian American woman heading up the voting rights program, you know, the national voting rights program” (laughs). At any rate, yeah. So I know it was all compacted, but we’re running out of time, so.

KWON: Also this book [*Earth Passages*]. Thank you so much for donating to Brown [University], but I was wondering if you could let me know what your passage or your photograph of this book was.

1:29:04

FOO: Umm yeah, I think I know what the favorite one is. I mean, there is a lot of favorite ones, you know, they’re all my kids, right? But probably this one.

KWON: “Kindergarten”? The photo or both?

FOO: The photo. And this is ice.

KWON: It’s ice?

FOO: It’s taken about 7:30AM and this is the Merced River in Yosemite. I’m walking along and the sun hasn’t hit this spot yet. Overnight, it was freezing, and it froze the swirl. And it hadn’t melted by the time I got there because the sun hadn’t hit that part of the river.

KWON: Wow.

FOO: Anyway, that’s my favorite.

KWON: It’s your favorite one?

FOO: That’s my favorite photo. And probably my favorite story is the “Girl-Child Slave.”

KWON: Oh, the first one?

FOO: The third one.

KWON: The third one? Oh, okay.

FOO: Yeah, yeah. And most of the—you know they're very short stories, they're more like poetry prose, and that's probably how I'm going to start writing book number three. So after people have read this and it ends and they said, What? Well, we need to know more than this.

1:30:18

KWON: (laughs) What is this? No, I really like that format though.

FOO: Uh-huh. But anyway, I'll probably start—you know the story I told you about the Kezar stadium vote and the St. Francis, the Hyatt, and the Fairmont hotels workers, "No, no, no!" I've written that vignette.

KWON: Oh, you've already written it? Yeah.

FOO: I'm going to write vignettes like that, because there's many of those. Eventually, we'll figure out what to do with them.

KWON: I think it also makes it more accessible to people. Instead of reading some formal book or some academic thing, it seems more people-centered.

FOO: Or some political track on a struggle. I think I would probably do it that way. Yeah. But I recently retired, I just decided, you know, I'm really tired of working and—

But I've been volunteering to do climate change work, because I think that's the pressing issue of our times. That if we don't have a habitable earth for our kids and grandkids to live on, then what is the purpose of all the struggles that we're having in terms of labor rights and immigrant rights and women rights, you know? And the billions of dollars that are siphoned off to deal with climate destruction and extreme weather; [climate change] siphons off all this money that could be going into education, into health care, you know? Anyway. The next ten years I'm working on climate disruption work.

1:31:39

KWON: Saving the world. Literally.

FOO: Saving the Earth.

KWON: Yeah, I think we really need more women of color voices.

FOO: Yeah.

KWON: It's a very white woman's issue.

FOO: It's a very—and APEN [Asian Pacific Environmental Network] is just one of my favorite organizations, but it's just too few of them, you know? Yeah, so if you're around August 3, come to the March and Rally at the Chevron refinery.

KWON: Yes. I'm here. I'm here till mid-August so I will go.

1:32:56

FOO: You should come.

KWON: Okay.

FOO: Yeah, APEN will be there along with 350.org and all the organizations.

KWON: Awesome.

FOO: At any rate, I will email you this article, so you'll have that.

KWON: Okay. Well, unless you have something else, we should probably wrap up the interview.

1:33:17

FOO: Yeah, no. The Smith Archives—the oral interview with the Smith people, I just have that—it's not going to be public until maybe ten years from now, some of what I spoke to you about is in that interview. Might've gone into a little bit more detail with you, for the hotel strike and the garment work. Yeah.

KWON: Awesome. Thank you so much.

FOO: You're welcome, you're welcome.

KWON: It's the making of history.

FOO: Well, thank you for doing this work so that it gets archived, and people have access to it.

KWON: Yeah, I mean it's for personal reasons, too. I wanted to hear everybody's story. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

teach her sentences out of my kindergarten speller. When Grandma settled down to read her Chinese newspapers, I was allowed to go out and play in the garden. I caught bugs, ate plums, and swam with the fish. When Grandpa finally came home for the evening, Grandma had dinner waiting and my toys put away. I liked kissing Grandpa's five o'clock shadow because it was prickly like the fuzzy melon that grew in the garden, but Grandma didn't like it because she never kissed him upon his return.

Grandma seems old, tiny and frail now. She takes ginseng, reindeer horn, and crushed pearl powder for her arthritis. She still tends her garden daily. The carp pond is gone now. Grandpa replaced it with a Jacuzzi for Grandma's sore body. Grandpa is retired. I suppose that he and Grandma sit in the Jacuzzi on warm evenings, watch the abundant colorful garden grow, smell the perfumed flowers and are as content as the carp who once lazed about in that same spot.

Lora Foo
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THE ROLE OF ASIANS IN THE RECENT STRUGGLES OF THE SAN FRANCISCO CULINARY INDUSTRY

The San Francisco Culinary Union, or Local 2, first came to the attention of the public in 1978 when its membership successfully unseated an entrenched bureaucracy and replaced it with younger trade union reformers. Ever since then, there's been rumblings from this turbulent union, culminating in the hotel strike of 1980. That year, Local 2 made the front pages. The pictures that appeared nationwide on television and in newspapers could not but show picket lines manned by militant Asian and Latino immigrant workers. The important role these immigrants played in these events has never been fully recorded. That's the topic of this paper.

Introduction

Historically, organized labor in this country has denied minorities the right to join unions either through exclusion clauses in union constitutions or in refusing to organize low pay industries where minority workers are concentrated. If and when minority workers are organized, their all white union leadership negotiate substandard contracts for them. Especially in those industries with high concentrations of immigrant workers, even with unions, their wages remain low, retirement benefits pathetic, and on-the-job protection non-existent. We seldom hear of these unions leading their workers on strike for higher wages, and indeed they almost never do. As a result the wage discrepancies between craft unions or blue-collar unions and unions with majority immigrant compositions continue to grow. Whereas the average wages of unionized Asian garment workers is around \$4 per hour, unskilled autoworkers and warehouse workers make more than twice that much. The average garment worker will retire with a pension of \$30 to \$50 a month after 20 years service while a blue collar worker can retire on \$500 to \$700 a month. Moreover, these unions have allowed discriminatory practices in hiring and promotions to go on unopposed, keeping minorities in entry-level jobs. This situation immigrant workers have tolerated for decades.

Beginning in 1975, a series of changes took place in the San Francisco Culinary Union, Local 2, that drastically changed this "passivism". It led to Asian and Latin immigrants playing a leading role in changing the face of this union; in making themselves the highest paid Culinary workers in the country; and in gaining the dignity and respect they deserve as workers. I'd like to talk about the events that led up to this and then to focus in on two events: the first is the successful struggle of Pilipina maids at the St. Francis Hotel to reduce their workload and the second is the hotel strike of 1980.

I. Background

The Union

Local 2 has 17,000 members and is the biggest local union in the Bay Area. About 66% of the membership is national minorities. Asians are the largest minority grouping, comprising 24% of the union (Chinese make up 14%, Pilipinos 8% and other Asians 2% of the union). The next large grouping is Latino and Spanish-speaking workers who comprise about 16% of the membership, followed by Black Americans who make up 8% of the total membership. The majority of the Asians are immigrants for whom unions and strikes are a first time experience.

Before 1975, there were five unions in San Francisco representing hotel and restaurants workers: bartenders, cooks, waiters/waitresses, dishwashers and maids. The leadership of each of these locals was all white. In 1975, the International Union merged the five locals into Local 2, rewrote the bylaws for the new local, ended the system of elected business agents and appointed Joe Belardi, then president of the Cooks Local, as president of Local 2. The International put off elections of officers of this new local until 1978. The new leadership of Local 2 remained all white. The significance of this merger will be discussed later.

The Union leadership at all levels, from the local on up to the International is racist. Locals throughout the country, especially in the large cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, are composed of large numbers of immigrants but the International constitution prevents non-citizens from running for office. Minority participation is excluded because the Union refuses to translate meetings and Union literature into the languages spoken by the membership. Labor contracts between management and Union are not translated so workers do not know their rights on the job and employers then violate the contract unchecked. Local 2 actively aided employers in discriminating against minorities; e.g., two lawsuits have been won by Blacks against the Union for discriminatory practices in job dispatching of waiters and bartenders. Local 2 has refused to organize Chinatown and Mission district restaurants. Racism in all its forms existed in the Union before the leadership change. These are only a few examples.

Local 2 is apart of the HREBIU, the Hotel, Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union. The top leaders of the International are under grand jury investigation for embezzlement of union funds. One of its officers has already been indicted.

The Workforce Covered by Local 2

Local 2 members work in hotels, motels, and restaurants, as cooks in hospitals and schools, and as vendors at racetracks. Half of the membership is concentrated in the large hotels, while the rest is scattered in large and small restaurants throughout the city, and in the above mentioned places. There are some very high-paid workers in Culinary and a lot more who are among the lowest paid in the city. Decades of discrimination has put whites at the high end of the pay scale and minorities at the low end. The following is a breakdown of the workforce by wage

levels, job categories and ethnic composition. Wages reflect those paid by the Hotel Employers Association, which represents 35 of the large first class hotels in the city.

The highest paid jobs are held by white males:

- (1) Cooks (chefs, sous chef), who before the strike averaged \$7.76 per hour and in 1981 make \$10.85 per hour.
- (2) Food servers (waitresses/waiters) in the expensive hotel dining rooms and restaurants who can average \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year.
- (3) Bartenders, whose starting salary in 1981 is \$72.92 per day and take home over twice that much with tips.
- (4) Bellmen whose tips bring them \$150-\$200 or more per day, when the hotel is full.

The lowest paid jobs are held by minorities:

- (1) Dishwashers are predominately Latino men. Before the strike they made \$30 per day. In 1981, they are making \$47.34 per day or \$5.91 per hour.
- (2) Buspersons are predominantly minority males - Pilipino, Black, Latino, and Chinese. Before the strike they made \$3.46 per hour plus a percentage of the food servers tips and today, 1981, they make \$4.63 per hour plus the food servers tips.
- (3) Room cleaners or maids are majority Pilipinas, followed by Latinas, Blacks and other Asians. Before the strike they made \$31.05 per day or \$4.14 per hour and today, 1981, make \$5.94 per hour.
- (4) Hallmen are majority Pilipino men (covered by Local 14 of the SEIU) and their wages are the same as maids.

The majority of workers in the lowest paid jobs are heads of households or supporters of families. The wages of many of them are so low that they qualify for food stamps and other government assistance.

In between the highest and lowest paid workers are:

- (1) Cooks in lower classifications such as station, fry, broiler, roast, etc. cooks who are predominately Chinese males. Before the strike they made \$6.35 per hour and in 1981, make \$9.74 per hour.
- (2) Food servers in medium priced restaurants are predominately white men and women, with some minorities.

(3) Pantry, who are predominately women--Chinese, Latina and white who before the strike made \$5.33 per hour and today make \$7.45 per hour. Pantry is the lowest paid of the food preparation workers and there is also not that many of them compared to other job categories.

Other workers in the hotels covered by other unions are:

Engineers and painters who are all white males; front desk personnel who are majority white; and laundry workers who are majority latina women.

Working Conditions in the Industry

The 1980 strike was inevitable in many ways. To stop it was like putting a lid on a volcano that's ready to explode. For workers the strike was a release of years of frustration and suppressed anger at the humiliating ways they'd been treated by the hotels. Even those highly paid workers had gripes. I'll start first with describing conditions under which maids must work because having worked an number of years as a maid, it is the job I'm most familiar with.

Maids

Maids work under great pressure to finish the assigned number of rooms and to do that job well. In most of the large hotels maids must clean 16 rooms a day. No matter what condition the rooms are in, they are expected to finish the assigned number of rooms in a seven and a half hour day. The maid's entire floor might check-out, leaving her with extra dirty rooms to put back in order, or she may not be able to enter rooms because guests want to sleep in late. No compensation is made for the extra time spent in checkout rooms or time lost in looking for rooms to clean. In order to finish all her rooms, maids regularly work through their rest periods, lunch-breaks and sometimes work overtime without pay. On a normal day with few checkouts, maids regularly skip their afternoon breaks. On heavy checkout days, they gulp down ten minute lunches or don't eat at all. Some older maids work straight from 8 am to 2 pm, stop for a half hour lunch, then resume working till 4 pm. I remember times working at the Hilton Hotel when I lost 80' much water from profuse sweating that I became nauseated several times during the day. At the St. Francis Hotel, on many occasions I'd find myself realizing at 2:30 pm that I hadn't gone to the bathroom since 7 am that morning. Maids have gotten hospitalized for exhaustion or have had to stay home for weeks to recover from overwork. Absenteeism due to illness among maids is high.

Along with the pressure to finish the rooms is the pressure to do quality work. Because maids must rush through the rooms to finish, they're bound to have forgotten something and live in fear of the inspectresses who may find something wrong. Maids have been reprimanded for missing a piece of hair on the bathroom floor or in the bathtub, leaving bits of toothpaste on the vanity, not shining or polishing the chrome on the toilet tissue holder, not wiping a fingerprint off the telephone, or not dusting the top of a lightbulb. The hotel St. Francis has a list of 69 things maids are responsible for in each room. They're

given only 20-30 minutes to clean a room. If they do everything required of them, they can't finish their rooms. If they take shortcuts, they're disciplined. Either way, maids lose.

Then there are the guest complaints. Hotels almost always take the word of the guest over the maid's. There is little protection against complaints or inspectresses' reports. The stress under which maids work is enough to give anyone ulcers.

Maids are shown no respect by the hotels. Grown women, many with college-age sons and daughters, are made to produce doctor's notes for one day illnesses, or they can't return to work. Workers in other departments are not required to show evidence of illness. Maids are treated like children. the St. Francis used to have performance charts on their bulletin boards for good attendance or proper use of equipment. We got a gold star next to our names, and as a Black maid said, "Just like my little girl when she's good at school."

The hotels have no regard for the well-being of the maids. If a maid gets sick at work, she's forced to finish her 16 rooms before going home. If she must leave early to take her children to the doctor, they force her to finish all 16 rooms; so she skips breaks and lunch and pushes herself beyond limits to finish early. At the Hilton last year, the management demanded a woman who had an abortion return to work a day early. She hemorrhaged. If there's a guest waiting in the lobby, the maid must clean the room even though she hasn't rested or eaten. The guest is more important. Maids are forced to work overtime six days a week, no matter how tired they are, otherwise they're laid off as punishment for refusing.

Most maids take pride in the work they do. But even here they're given no respect. Older maids are told that their work is not good enough for them to have their own floors. This is tantamount to telling your mother or grandmother that her house is filthy and she is a poor housekeeper.

Many maids from the Philippines are professionals, nurses, teachers, lab technicians, pharmacists, etc., and qualify for others jobs in the hotel. But when they apply for promotions, they're insulted with "you're just a maid!", or excuses such as "no local experience" or "no recent experience." Once at the St. Francis, a Pilipina maid applied for the position of cashier in one of the dining rooms. In the Philippines she had worked as a payroll clerk for a large company. She handled money on a daily basis, hundreds of dollars worth, and had the responsibility of distributing the weekly pay of workers in cash. In her interview for the cashier job, personnel asked her if she'd ever seen a hundred dollar bill. She said yes. A \$1000 dollar bill? Yes. A \$10,000 bill? No. "Well," they said, "you don't qualify." Maids are trapped in entry-level jobs with no chance of promotions.

Dishwashers

Dishwashers are predominately Latino immigrants. Moreover, many Latinos in kitchens across town are undocumented workers. Employers take advantage of this fact to superexploit these workers. Any complaints about the very dirty, wet and steaming hot conditions or abusive treatment are met with threats of calling in the Immigration and Naturalization Service. INS raids are in fact very common occurrences. These are

examples of the conditions dishwashers are forced to work under.

At the Fairmont last year, it was discovered that the hotel had kept as many as 20 dishwashers on "extra" status even though they actually worked fulltime, some for as long as six years. Putting them in extra status meant that the hotel didn't have to pay their vacation, medical, dental or retirement benefits. It meant they had no seniority status and could be scheduled to work any hour of the day or night. They weren't paid overtime and were arbitrarily laid off outside of seniority order. In addition, extortion was rampant in the department. In order to change from an extra to a steady worker, dishwashers had to pay the supervisor \$400-\$500. There were also kickbacks on a daily basis in order to go to work each day. This and much more goes on in kitchens throughout the city, but because of the threat of calling in the INS, dishwashers are afraid to complain. In 1975, the INS picked up 38 workers at the Hyatt Regency. A number of them had just gained enough seniority to qualify for sick leave, vacation and health and welfare benefits. The hotel wanting to save money was the reason suspected for their calling the INS at that time. In 1977, the INS picked up a Latino at the Fairmont who made known the extortions that went on in the kitchen. The latest case is only a few months ago, August 1981, at the St. Francis Hotel. A Latino dishwasher who filed a grievance against the hotel was called into the personnel office. He found no managers around but two immigration officers waiting for him.

Buspersons

The main complaint of buspersons is that they are regularly passed over for waiter positions. A busser with 10 years, 20 years of experience will not get promoted because he is the wrong skin color. They'd rather hire a young, inexperienced college boy than a minority.

Higher Paid Workers

Even these workers have grievances against the hotels. They lack job security and their tips are stolen regularly by managers. In 1978, food servers at the St. Francis were laid off when two dining rooms closed. They lost all their years of seniority. When a third room opened, these workers applied but the majority was rejected. A few young whites were hired, but none of the Pilipino and Black workers were. In other rooms in the hotel, servers with as little as six months seniority continued to work while those with 20 years seniority were laid off. They had no bumping rights into these other rooms. In 1977, the Hilton was under grand jury investigation for pocketing tips left over by conventions. The amount pocketed was estimated at \$1 million or more. These tips should have been divided up among all those workers who served the conventioners. In 1978, six older white waitresses were fired from the Crown Room of the Fairmont Hotel for allegedly stealing from the till. The basis of the firing was an outside spotter's agency report that came in months after the incidences were supposed to have happened. Two of the waitresses had 15 years seniority with the hotel, and one had over 20 years.

II. The 1978-1979 Union Elections

In merging the five locals in 1975, the International Union wanted more control, but they were instead digging their own graves in Local 2.

Before the merger, organized rank and file opposition groups existed in the higher paid cooks and dining room workers locals. However, on the whole, these higher paid workers were satisfied with the status quo, so the opposition groups never made much headway. Among the discontented lower paid workers who badly needed change, no organized opposition leadership ever emerged. The merger brought the more articulate higher paid worker, those capable of taking over and running the union, and the large grouping of discontented lower paid workers, those capable by their sheer numbers to vote for change, together under one roof. Between 1975 and 1978, the opposition organized among this new membership in preparation for the elections scheduled for April 1978. Belardi's actions as president gave the opposition ammunition to thoroughly discredit him. In a short time he gained the hatred of the thousands of low paid maids, dishwashers, buspersons, and medium income white workers. In 1975, Belardi signed a five year contract covering six thousand workers with the Hotel Employers Association (HEA) where workers lost 14% to inflation. He gave away the right to strike over wages in the fourth year of the contract. In 1976, during the industrywide Health, Welfare, and Pension negotiations which affect all 17,000 members of the Union, Belardi agreed with the employers that they no longer need to pay dependent coverage, that workers themselves should pay the \$15 per month to cover their families. This became a burden on the low paid workers, many of whom weren't bringing home full paychecks during the winter layoffs. He went to the bargaining table with a proposal to raise monthly pension payments to a maximum of \$200 per month, guaranteeing to keep his membership in poverty after they retired as well.

In August of 1977, the contract with the Golden Gate Restaurant Association, covering 225 restaurants expires. Belardi refuses to pull the workers out on strike and didn't even give them that choice. He continues negotiations 8 months past the expiration date and finally rams through a sellout contract where workers lose 4 months back pay, and receive wages that are no better than the hotel workers. The same year, the Zims restaurant chain pulls out of the restaurant Association, refusing to recognize the Union contract. Belardi refuses to pull the Zims workers out on strike and they work without a contract for a year, without pay increases or protection. Zims begins firing Union supporters. Earlier that year, in February and again in May, Belardi tries to get a \$2 per month dues increase from the membership. This is on top of the \$1 per month increase for a strike fund that hasn't been used. The opposition mobilizes the membership out to vote and both times defeats his proposal. Five thousand workers come out to vote. This is the membership's first victory and show of strength. From this time on, Belardi's days are numbered. In January of 1978, the opposition forms a slate, the alliance of the Rank and File (ARF) that challenges Belardi in the April elections. ARF was majority whites, 1 Chinese, 1 Black, and 1 Latina, and mainly from the higher paid crafts of food servers, cooks, and bartenders. At this time very few minority leaders step forward in Union-wide politics. There are fighters in the shop floor, but they remained largely unknown. ARF runs

on a reform program promising to bring drastic changes to the Union and industry. Six thousand Local 2 members come out to vote and the majority elect David McDonald, the ARF candidate for President. ARF wins half of the salaried positions and part of the Executive Board. A young Chinese busperson, Winston Ching, then a student at U.C. Berkeley, wins a Vice-President position.

ARF however couldn't consolidate its power. Shortly after the elections, differences over how to implement the campaign promises emerge, and ARF splits. That part of the Belardi machine that managed to stay in power disrupts every Executive Board meeting, and the membership meeting that is held. They sabotage the workings of the Union and no business can be conducted. Six months later, under the pretext that factionalism is paralyzing the Union, the International places the local under trusteeship. Eight months later, trusteeship is ruled illegal by federal Judge Stan Weigel and new elections are ordered for May 1979. This time because of the splits in the rank and file opposition, the International backed slate wins. I will return to this later.

In the short 6 months that this new administration was in power, many gains were made by the workers. For example, McDonald fires the worst of the do-nothing Belardi business agents and hires younger more militant staff who went into the houses to handle grievances. ARF organizes efforts to elect shop stewards throughout the industry. With the Union behind them, the Hyatt Regency maids win the fight to cut their quota from 16 to 15 rooms a day. Through a series of meetings with management where maids spoke out about the heavy workload, through job actions such as leaving rooms on particularly hard days, Hyatt management finally gives in and cuts the room assignment down to 15. The new administration pulls the Zims workers out on strike. This is the first major strike for Culinary workers in 30 years. Eleven of the Zim's San Francisco restaurants are struck, and because of the overwhelming support from the communities and customers, 2 restaurants must close down. For the first time in the history of the Union a rank and file negotiating committee is elected. After 9 weeks on strike, the workers are victorious, winning back everything they had under the Golden Gate Restaurant Association contract.

In these few months, large sectors of the work force have direct experience with what a rank and file controlled union could do for them. This momentum for change and the refusal to continue living under intolerable conditions could not be ignored by the International. The trustee they picked to run Local 2 during trusteeship was an organizer for the International who had a progressive image--a man named Vincent Sirabella. Sirabella came out with a 10 point program for progress which included the demands of the rank and file, such as Union-wide shop steward elections, elected rank and file negotiating committees, an end to discrimination in dispatching from the hiring hall, etc. Sirabella's hopes were that when trusteeship ended he would run for and win the presidency of Local 2.

With Judge Weigel's ruling, elections came sooner than the International anticipated. They knew they couldn't run any of the old guard Belardi types on its slate if it was to win back the local. They chose Charles Lamb, who the year before had run on the ARF ticket and won Executive Vice-President position, to be their presidential candidate.

Charles Lamb ran on a program that touched on the heart of the needs of the rank and file in order to gain the votes. Because of the split in the opposition, two slates against him, Lamb won by 39% of the votes. 61% voted for the opposition. Under pressure from an awakened rank and file, Lamb implemented some of his campaign promises. He hired a number of younger bilingual business agents, continued the policy of electing rank and file negotiating committees, started a more active campaign to organize the non-union shops and restaurants in town, and in 1980 began preparations for the hotel strike.

During this period of internal Union turmoil when trusteeship had just been imposed, the maids at the St. Francis decide that their situation had become intolerable and they had to take matters into their own hands. Encouraged by news of the Union's victory at Zims and the Hyatt Regency maids success in winning one less room a day, the maids start a struggle against the hotel management that would last a year and a half, culminating finally in an overwhelming victory for them. This victory comes in April 1980, on the eve of the city-wide hotel strike, and serves as a beacon for maids throughout the city that if they stood up in unity against the hotels, they too would win the dignity and respect they deserved.

III. The St. Francis Maids Struggle

The St. Francis is one of the oldest and most prestigious hotels in San Francisco. To match the hotel's reputation, the housekeeping department is very demanding of its staff. Attention to fine details of cleaning guest rooms is expected of the maids. Besides making the beds, dumping the garbage, vacuuming, scrubbing the wash basin, bathtub and toilet, and wiping the bathroom floor spotless in 16 rooms, the maids must dust everything they can reach--the top of light bulbs, lampshades, picture frames, window sills, furniture legs and rungs, etc. Every single item must be arranged in a prescribed order, electric blanket controls must be set at "5," shower heads must be turned to the wall, window drapes must be in the exact 1/3 open position, thermostats must be on the cool setting, lampshade seams must be toward the wall, sofa and armchair must be in exact position, room service menu must be on the bed closest to the bathroom, etc. In order to finish their rooms, often maids take shortcuts by omitting certain time consuming details. The result is they get reprimanded by Housekeeping. Maids have been issued warnings for incorrectly arranging different colored hangers in guest closets, incorrect arrangement of guest supplies and hotel literature, for too many matches left in guest rooms as well as not enough matches, for drapes drawn too wide, for crooked bedspreads, pictures hanging crooked, pillows not fluffed, sheets not tucked properly, lint on the mirror, lint on sheets, wrong ashtrays left on wrong tables, literature that is bent, and so forth. The demand for such high quality work and frivolous detail is stringently enforced yet maids are given only 20 minutes to clean an occupied room and 30 minutes to clean a checkout. Maids are put into an incredible bind. They must take shortcuts to finish their rooms, yet they do this at the peril of being reprimanded or losing their floors. Under such pressure, they end up skipping their breaks and pushing themselves beyond limits.

Over the summer of 1978, the hotel began adding even more items to the maids' workload, such as the use of a computer to record the status of each room before and after cleaning, making sure monograms on laundry bags face a certain direction in the closet, etc. In addition, the summer months and September were especially busy, with more checkouts than usual and maids requested to do a lot of overtime. Things were becoming unbearable.

The Business Agent who had been assigned to the hotel, along with representatives of the maids, held a series of meetings with management to discuss remedies for the unreasonable workload. But management did nothing, choosing to ignore the plight of the house workers, especially Asian, Latin, and Black women, who were, after all, cheap and expendable labor to them. Tired of the abuse, mistreatment and disrespect from management, the maids decide to take the desperate action they took. On October 24, through the initiative of 2 Pilipina maids, the St. Francis maids held a meeting across the street at Mannings Cafeteria, elected their shop stewards and agreed to take what was rightfully theirs, their full rest and meal periods. On the morning of October 26th, the agreed upon day, at 10 am, maids began leaving their floors and heading for the employees' cafeteria. Maids, who in all the years they'd been with the hotel had never taken a morning break, joined their sisters and rested their weary bones for 15 minutes. At 10 am, 12 noon, and 2 pm of that day and for weeks thereafter, the cafeteria was filled with red uniformed maids. At the end of the first day, all hell broke loose. Management didn't know what had hit them. Because the majority of the maids had taken all their rest breaks, each had to leave two rooms unfinished. Over one hundred occupied rooms had not been cleaned by 4 pm that day nor at the end of each day for two weeks thereafter. The hotel had to recruit managers from departments throughout the hotel to clean these rooms. Donning houseman's uniforms, the assistant manager, food manager, front desk manager, etc. worked 5 to a room, 1 in the bathroom and 2 to each bed. Even with 5 men to a room, they couldn't finish as fast as one maid. That silver haired gentleman, the general manager of the hotel was seen carrying a bucket and mop, scrubbing toilets.

I can look back now and laugh, but the situation at that time was extremely tense. Housekeeping came down fast and hard on the maids. The first week, a shop steward was suspended. The second week a Pilipina maid was fired. Throughout the month of November, five other maids were suspended and Housekeeping issued over 100 warning notices to intimidate the maids. The housekeeper and supervisor went from floor to floor, confronting maids in guest rooms and interrogating them after work as to why they couldn't finish their work. "Taking your breaks" was never an acceptable answer. Slowly the hotel's harassment and intimidation succeeded in scaring many maids back to skipping breaks. But enough maids had the courage to carry on the fight that by the sixth week, the hotel was calling for expedited arbitration. It wasn't until March of 1979 that arbitration actually got underway. During 2 days of hearings, 19 maids testified for the Union. There were such emotional and moving accounts of the condition maids worked under that several maids broke down in tears. At one point, tears could even be seen in the eyes of the arbitrator. On April 17, 1980, a year and a half after that fateful day when maids stood up for their rights, the arbitrators issued their

ruling. It was resounding victory for the maids. They ruled that the hotel had unjustly disciplined, suspended and fired maids because they took their breaks. These maids were made whole. All the 100 warning slips were pulled out of the personnel files. Above all, the arbitrators ruled that the hotel was violating the contract in assigning an unreasonable number of rooms. They set the maximum room assignment at 15 rooms per day, with the right to drop rooms after 8 checkouts. When maids got the news of this award, the reaction was sheer jubilation. That the arbitrators could understand so deeply what the maids had to say was totally unexpected.

How was it that the maids, given the heavy-handed way management reacted to their action, held out as long as they did? First, there was the factor of national pride. There was a strong sense among the Pilipinas that they were being treated with disrespect because they were Pilipinas. There was a national pride to defend here and because of this there was peer group pressure not to break rank. The two newly elected Pilipina shop stewards did all they could in the first 6 weeks to encourage their sisters to stick together. This same sense of national pride held the Latina maids together. Three Latinas were among the six maids suspended for taking their breaks. The second factor was the firm support given by the business agent in the course of the struggle. For the first three weeks that maids were taking their breaks, she was at the hotel each morning at 8 am and in the cafeteria during breaks and lunches giving encouragement to the maids. Maids saw her stand up to hotel security, refusing to leave even under threat of arrest. To the maids she represented the Union behind them, even though Trustee Sirabella was openly hostile to the actions of the maids. and finally, the maids had an unshakeable belief that the hotel was morally and legally wrong. We believed that if only the government and public knew about the sweatshop conditions that existed in the hotels, they would find such conditions intolerable and repugnant. We clung to that belief throughout the months of arbitration and the months of waiting when Housekeeping continued its harassment of those of us who insisted on taking our breaks, and, in the end, we got justice.

IV. The San Francisco Hotel Strike of 1980

In describing the conditions under which the majority of hotel workers labored and the low wages they received in return, I have basically laid out the issues in this strike. The sentiments and needs of the workers were formalized into a set of contract demands by a negotiating committee they had elected from among hotel workers. This committee was composed of maids, dishwashers, food servers, bartenders and cooks. Half the committee were minorities—Black, Latinos, and Asians (including a Chinese dishwasher, maid, and two Chinese food servers). The committee found itself with the monumental task of having to rewrite the entire first contract because decades of labor peace in the hotel industry had so eroded contract language that it provided virtually no protection to workers. On May 1st, negotiations began. the Union's

committee of low paid, mistreated workers sat face to face with the general managers of the 35 luxury hotels, represented by the Hotel Employers Association (HEA). The following is a summary of the Union's demands:

(1) Wage Proposal

In first year of contract, 68% increase for lowest paid workers and 38% increase for higher paid workers. For maids and dish-washers, this would mean bringing their wages up from \$4.74 per hour to \$8.00 per hour. For the higher paid workers, it meant catching up to inflation and raising their standard of living.

(2) Holiday, Vacation, and Sick Leave Benefits

-Parity with benefits the other 5 unions in hotels already have. While Local 2 only has 3 paid holidays, the other unions have 9 paid holidays. While all other unions have full vacation pay, Local 2's was only partial pay.

-No doctor's note for illnesses.

This demand was one in series that dealt with workers being treated with respect.

(3) Maids Proposals

-Maximum of 12 rooms a day with the right to drop additional rooms after cleaning 6 checkouts, making 2 cots, working 2 or more floors, etc.

-sections and floors to be assigned by seniority;

-provisions for protection against unfounded guest complaints, e.g. maids may not be disciplined solely on basis of verbal complaints;

-plus other proposals reducing workload over and above reduction in rooms, and those concerning the safety of maids on the job.

(4) Free Meals for All Workers

Maids and other hotel service department workers must pay for their meals while all other workers in Local 2 get 3 free meals a day. This form of discrimination against the maids who already are the lowest paid workers, actually meant that each time they had to pay for their breakfast, lunch, or dinner in the employee cafeteria, they were giving back part of their wages to the hotel.

(5) Protection for Undocumented Workers

-hotelwide seniority, wages or benefits because of a change in workers' name, social security number or immigration status;

-hotels should cooperate with the INS only to the extent required by law; INS agents should not be allowed on hotel property without arrest or search warrants, except in cases of hot pursuit of a particular suspect.

(6) Seniority

-hotelwide seniority for choice of days off, shifts, sections and vacation periods, and for promotion and layoffs;

-eliminate room seniority (protection for dining room workers).

-no forced overtime, and choice of overtime by seniority.

(7) Affirmative Action

-to achieve parity in the percentage of minorities and women in the higher paid crafts with the percentage of minorities and women residing in San Francisco through:

- a) promotions by hotel seniority (to enable qualified women and minorities with many years of seniority to be promoted);
- b) employer/union-sponsored training programs to upgrade skills of minorities;
- c) hiring of all minorities from hiring hall

-to provide equal protection to minority workers, contract must be translated into Spanish, Tagalog and Chinese, and workers must be provided with translations during all meetings involving grievances.

(8) Shop Stewards

-must have the power to enforce contract on the job, investigate grievances and represent workers during working hours. The old contract didn't recognize shop stewards as union representatives. This fact more than any others symbolizes how powerless the Union had become.

While the cry for respect may be the thread connecting all the above statements there are two demands in particular that I want to mention. That the Union even had to write these demands only show the degree to which the men who work for the hotels have been abused by management. The first demand reads:

All telephone and other messages received by management relating to the health and safety of the immediate family...shall

immediately be relayed to such employee. Prompt release of an employee, should it be necessary, shall take precedent over all other considerations.

In 1977, at the Hilton Hotel, Housekeeping was given a message to relay to a maid that her son had been hospitalized. That message was not delivered until near the end of the day. By that time, her son had already died. This type of callousness more than any bread and butter issue propelled these workers to strike against the hotels. The second demand basically says:

No employee could be subjected to a lie detector test or similar tests for any reason by the hotels.

A Latina maid at the Huntington Hotel was accused of jamming the building's sewer system! She was taken to the basement of the hotel and subjected to a lie detector test, and subsequently fired. The issue in this strike really is the lack of human rights and dignity.

The Hotels called the Union's proposals "outrageous." Their counter-proposal showed their total insensitivity to the plight of the workers and was an insult to the intelligence of maids, dishwashers and higher paid workers. Instead of addressing the issue of maids' being overworked, they proposed that maids clean even more rooms. They offered the maids an extra seventy-five cents a day if they'd drop the proposal for a maximum room quota! They offered a 24.5% pay raise over 3 years, added Christmas as a paid holiday and proposed that maids work split shifts. They proposed a list of "specialty rooms," expensive dining rooms. With this proposal, not only were they saying that they were admitting to no past discriminatory practices, but they wanted the right to keep certain dining rooms all white and male. They wanted their managers to have a share of the workers' tips. They wanted the right to make deductions from the wages of those employees who handled cash in case of any cash shortages. They proposed that if the Union didn't meet the time limits they set up for handling grievances, the Union would lose the grievance but not vice versa. In all the hotels put forth 50 to 60 "take-aways."

As June 30th, the expiration date of the contract, drew near, and the hotels made no substantial movement in their position, it became clear that the hotels wanted to force the union to strike. They believed they could take advantage of divisions in the union to smash it once and for all. They began strike preparations by moving management personnel and scabs into the hotels to live, boarding up street level windows and hiring extra security guards. The Hyatt Regency even had guard dogs patrolling the lobby and guest were confronted by security guards to show their keys before being allowed in. Local 2 members were equally as determined to hold out until their demands were met.

On June 24th, over 1000 workers rally in Union Square for a decent contract. But the Union leadership, under the illusion that the hotels would settle to avoid the strike, is slow to begin real strike preparations. As a result, Local 2 must agree to extension of contract until July 13, and must continue negotiating. On July 7th, Hotel workers vote 2,845 to 192 to give the negotiating committee the authorization to call a strike on July 17th if the hotels refuse to make substantial improvements in their

offer. In a last ditch effort to avoid a strike, the two sides meet all night, but at 4:30 am, talks break down when the hotels reject the Union's final pared down package. The Strike is on.

The Union selectively strikes ten of the most prepared hotels, setting up picketlines at the St. Francis, Hilton, Fairmont, Mark Hopkins, Manx, Hyatt Regency, Hyatt on Union Square, Pacific Plaza, Stanford Court, and Handlery. Across the street from the St. Francis is another HEA hotel, the Stewart where no Union picketline has been set up. As the Latina and Black maids of the Stewart arrive for work at 7 am and see St. Francis workers on strike, they refuse to start work, demanding the Union give them picket signs also. Workers at the Sheraton Palace also walk out in a wildcat, so strong are the sentiments against the hotels. Most other HEA hotels begin locking out Local 2 members according to an agreement all 35 hotels made that if one hotel is struck, the rest will lockout. Those small hotels that delay locking out employees are threatened with suits for damages by the HEA.

Ninety-eight percent of the 6000 hotel workers are on strike. Less than 100 cross the picket lines. Despite the lack of leadership from the Union staff, and the fact that for the majority of the strikers, this is their first strike ever, leaders from among the rank and file quickly step forward to act as picket captains. They hold their lines together through the strike. Workers form massive, rowdy picket lines, harass hotel guests who cross their lines and keep them awake all night with pots and pans and chants. They chase away scabs, stop deliveries, and stand up to police harassment.

From the first day of the strike, it was apparent that the lines in front of many of the big downtown hotels were manned largely by minorities-Asians, Latinos, and Blacks. During the day shift, Filipina women made up the majority of some of these lines. The swing shift picket line at the Fairmont Hotel is 3/4 Chinese, manned by Chinese workers from the Tonga Room. Chinese maids from the Chinatown Holiday Inn (all the 5 Holiday Inns signed a no-strike agreement with the Union in exchange for accepting whatever agreement is reached between the HEA and the Union) joins the downtown picket lines each day after work and on their days off. Asian workers play an active role in organizing and manning picket lines. In response to this new militance, the hotels in close cooperation with the S.F. police, single out Asian Union members for arrest and racial beatings. To cite some examples: 1) a Chinese woman cashier and a Chinese waiter, both picket captains at the Fairmont, were arrested in the evening of July 19th. The Police called the woman over to the entrance of the hotel. She refused to cross the picket line and was arrested allegedly for "resisting arrest" and using "obscene" language. The other picket captain questions the police and is arrested for allegedly "assaulting an officer." All witnesses state that both arrests were unprovoked. 2) A Japanese American picket captain at the Hyatt Regency was arrested on the evening of July 24th for allegedly "disturbing the peace." He was standing watching the picketline with his wife and five-year old son. The police grabbed him and brutally assaulted his wife, who was later hospitalized. 3) A Chinese American, member of the Union's Executive Board, was arrested for allegedly setting fire to an awning at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel. At the time the blaze started, he was standing curbside, far from the awning addressing picketing workers.

The only witness is a drunken English tourist. This type of racist harassment is aimed at intimidating Asian workers back into passivism, back into their quietly suffering roles. It will lead to protests from Asian American community leaders and organizations. Meanwhile, Asians along with their Latin and Black brothers and sisters continue to be the backbone of the strike.

The strike has an immediate impact in San Francisco's one billion dollar a year tourist industry. Mayor Feinstein reports that within 36 hours of the strike, the city's visitor business is down 20%. In an interview in "East Bay Today," the Director of the Visitors and Convention Bureau, Robert Sullivan estimates that the city's tourist related business is losing \$125,000 to \$150,000 per day, and that by the end of the second week, had lost \$3 million. Throughout the strike the hotels lie, claiming that they are filled to capacity with full housekeeping available. In fact all hotels are operating at reduced services. They ask guests to make their own beds, carry their own luggage and eat outside the hotel. Because all but a handful of the cooks walk, most hotel dining rooms close, leaving open one room to serve sandwiches and the like. The large hotels must close down sections, floors or different wings of their buildings, renting only those rooms they can service with reduced staff. Taxi drivers confirm that business is off between airports and downtown hotels. The Visitors Bureau reports that their emergency placement service is making 500 placements a day, shifting visitors to non-struck hotels. Hotels in Marin County, the East Bay, and Peninsula are nearly filled to capacity as tourists leave San Francisco looking for more comfortable quarters. News of the massive picket lines and inconveniences to guests spread nationwide, especially after the July 22nd mass demonstration at the Hyatt Regency where 46 strikers and Union officers are arrested. Pictures of helmeted riot police dragging demonstrators into paddy wagons make its way into the newspapers across the country and even overseas. The word goes out to avoid San Francisco this summer.

By the end of the third week of the strike, at least 8 conventions totalling 20,000 people have cancelled. The largest of these is the 12,000 delegate American Chemical Congress convention which moves its late-August event to Las Vegas. It is estimated that S.F. hotels, restaurants, shops, cabdrivers, and other service industries lose \$5 million because of this cancellation.

On August 2nd, close to 3000 strikers and their supporters from unions throughout downtown march past thirteen struck hotels. The strike escalates. On August 7th, a meeting of 150 persons representing S.F. labor is held at the Retail Clerks Union hall. Plans are made at this meeting for a huge demonstration, a "March for Dignity," for August 23rd with 20,000 people expected to participate.

It is at this point when the hotels are hurting, when S.F. labor and communities begin to rally around the strikers, when the strike begins to take on the semblance of a civil rights movement, that the International Union steps in, and negotiations are secreted away to Los Angeles without the rank and file negotiating committee. On August 10th, the union officers return to San Francisco to sell a tentative agreement. This agreement is basically no different than the one the negotiating committee turned down the morning of the strike. The rank and file committee again rejects the settlement two to one. But they are not given equal time to

recommend a "no" vote to the membership. Echoing the threats of the management that the 6000 workers may be replaced permanently, and lying about the gains made in L.A.; the Union leaders convince workers to accept the contract by a vote of 1,823 for and 523 against. It is mainly workers from the Fairmont, St. Francis, and Hyatt Regency who vote no. This is where the picket lines are the strongest and the rank and file leaders more trusted than the Union officers. Strikers in the other hotels give up as they see their Union leadership capitulate. The strike ends on August 12th. But on August 13th, it is discovered that the hotels are reneging on the amnesty for all and a retroactive pay agreement. There are also 11 points in contention. The hotels refuse to let workers back to work until this is cleared up. The Union threatens to begin picketing again. In order to put a final end to the dispute, the International makes an unprecedented move that is an embarrassment to the labor movement. They offer to bankroll the workers' retroactive pay, about \$250,000 worth; in other words, from our dues' money. On August 15th, workers begin returning to work. The Union officers continue negotiating the 11 points in contention, keeping the membership ignorant of what these points are. The contract is finally signed on December 23rd, five months after the strike ended. Because workers have returned to work, the Union continues to negotiate with no leverage, no bargaining power, and more.

Were the workers defeated? NO.

Local 2 workers now are the highest paid hotel workers in the country. As of July 1981, maids and dishwashers make \$5.94 per hour, which is at least better than Los Angeles maids who make little over the federal minimum. No other contract in the country has a maximum on room assignment--S.F. maids now have this minimum protection. Other gains include: promotions by hotel seniority, bumping rights to other jobs, in case of layoff, stronger shop steward language, 9 paid holidays after 3 years. But it must be pointed out that the above gains were all made before workers went on strike; the Union already got these concessions from the hotel owners. Workers voted them down the first time around because they felt they were only crumbs thrown to them from the bosses table. After 27 days on strike, the Union had managed to only get rid of some of the take-aways, but stood a chance of winning so much more for its membership. But that was precisely the point. The International had decided along with the hotels that Local 2 workers had gotten quite enough. With what Local 2 had already won, it was enough to set an example for locals throughout the country. The San Francisco strike was an opening round for battles to come for the 435,000 members nationwide represented by the International. And indeed, just this year incumbents in the Los Angeles local almost lost the election to an opposition slate that ran on a platform of "San Francisco wages for Los Angeles workers."

More important than the losses are the gains made by workers in this strike. This new contract is the foundation from which stronger contracts will be negotiated in the future. And as workers themselves say, "now we know what to do next time around."

V. Conclusion

I'd like to conclude this paper with some remarks on Asians as trade union members and Asian leadership in Local 2.

Asian immigrants have been labeled unorganizable by labor unions. Whether it be racist stereotyping or other sources, real or imagined that created this misconceptions, the facts I've presented about the role of Asians in Local 2 should put to rest this lie. When given a real alternative, Asians came out by the thousands to vote for new leadership in Local 2. When they saw the Union behind them, Asian women at the St. Francis took on the hotel management and won. With the Union behind them, Asians along with other minority groups were the backbone of the hotel strike. When they are no longer ignorant of their rights under contract, Asians will fight to enforce these rights. When they know of their rights in the Union, they fight to defend democracy in the Union. They are the staunchest of trade unionists around today. Trade union traditions live in the Asian worker of Local 2, more so than in many all-White unions today.

What about Asian leadership in Local 2? Why is it that no organized opposition groups have emerged from the lower paid stratum of Asian and Latino workers? Those who make up the opposition caucuses tend to come from the waitresses, cooks, bartenders, and cashier categories. Leadership of these caucuses remain in the hands of college-educated, young, white workers and American-born minority workers. They are not truly representative of the majority of the culinary industry. The Asian immigrants who stepped forward as leaders in the recent struggles cannot operate in these caucuses because they are not fluent in English. When they come to caucus meetings, they sit and watch as decisions are made for them. They remain mere tokens. It is also difficult for them to take leadership and run the Union because all business is conducted in English.

What I see as needed for immigrants to participate equally in the Union is the establishment of separate branches under the umbrella of Local 2 of the major language groupings-Spanish speaking, Chinese, Tagalog, and English. These branches would hold their own meetings in their own languages, and issue written material in their own languages. Voting on issues concerning the entire membership of Local 2 would be done in these branches and an equitable system must be set up to determine how votes will be carried. Mere translations in Union meetings from English into Chinese or Spanish or Tagalog is not acceptable because it still leaves immigrants out as second-class citizens. This idea of branches may seem complicated and cumbersome, but it's the only way I know of fully guaranteeing that Asian immigrants and other non-English speaking workers can participate in running their Union and choosing their own leadership.





