

## CITYWATCH SPECIAL: LABOR DAY LA



an insider look at city hall

# CITYWATCH

citywide edition

### CityWatch Special Labor Day



August 31, 2005  
Volume 3 Issue 11

**CityWatch Today**—Los Angeles' Labor Unions have been supportive of Neighborhood Councils. A number of union leaders serve on NC boards.

It's not an illogical marriage. Both unions and Neighborhood Councils are engaged in the grassroots organization of people in need of a voice.

Labor has played a key role in the shaping of our city. Its influence has determined the outcome of elections and influenced government policy and the quality of LA life.

This Labor Day, CityWatch recognizes these contributions and salutes the working men and women of Los Angeles and Southern California.

—Editor

### Say What?

*"The city is better off with all this union activity because we are organizing people in a productive way."*

—Maria Elena Durazo, President  
Hotel & Restaurant Employees  
July, 2000



### LA Labor: A Retrospective

## Labor's Power is being Tested in California; But It's Not the First Time

By Mark Siegel

These are critical days for organized labor in Los Angeles. It faces a number of challenges to maintain its power in state and local politics. To understand where it is today, it might be useful to understand where it's coming from.



conservative.

A growing and emerging labor movement, in the 1920's and 1930s, was marginalized by anti-communist purges. After World War II, Los Angeles experienced large population growth. The manufacturing sector was expanding. Aerospace, automobiles, film and construction-related unions dominated the County Federation of Labor. With the Communists and Socialists black balled, the unions were more politically

In the early 1970s, the State legislature passed the Meyers, Milius, Brown Act, which made organizing public employees into unions much easier. The size and strength of public sector union members skyrocketed. These unions were decidedly more liberal than the industrial unions. Naturally they supported the expansion of government services. They were the primary opposition to Prop 13 and the anti-government initiatives that followed.

*Continued on Page 5. See "Retrospective"*

### LA Labor Today

## LA Leads Unions into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

By Rafael Pizarro

*"This is the beginning of a new era for organized labor. This fight wasn't about us. That's why we got such tremendous community and political support."*

While the labor movement in this country has been on the decline nationally for a long time now, unions have actually grown in California, where union density increased to almost 18 percent of all workers between 1998 and 2002. And although an unfriendly Washington administration is currently slowing labor union's successes, especially in the private sector, California labor has been able to hold back the general decline by its tactics and its resiliency. It's worth looking back briefly on a key moment in LA's recent labor history to understand what's behind those tactics that give LA and California a legitimate claim as leaders of the labor movement into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

*Continued on Page 4. See "LA Leads Unions"*

**LABOR DAY LA 2005**

**LA Has Been at the Forefront of the Struggle**  
**Antonio Villaraigosa, Mayor of Los Angeles**

This Labor day we celebrate the contributions of the men and women who work hard every day to make our city and Nation prosperous.



America was built on the blood and sweat of workers who had envisioned a better future for our Country. They organized themselves into unions and began the collective bargaining process that built the middle class America is so proud of. That struggle continues today.

The Labor movement in Los Angeles has been the forefront of the struggle for justice and equality for workers. There is no other city in America with a more diverse mixture of cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. The Los Angeles labor movement has led the way in organizing and improving the lives of working families in America

While union membership has decreased in other cities and in other states around the nation, union membership in California is up by 500,000 new members and much of that increase is here in Los Angeles.

So this Labor Day we salute working people and we salute the labor movement of Los Angeles for its leadership and efforts to improve the quality of life for all working people and their families.

-- Antonio Villaraigosa

**Labor Day LA Perspective**

**Only One conclusion: LA Labor Alive & Well**

By Ken Draper

Organized labor has been a part of the fabric of Los Angeles life since the 20's. The power of its influence has fluctuated over the years. Almost cyclically. But, since the Janitors for Justice victory in 2000, one can come to only one conclusion: Labor in LA is alive and well and is suffering no power outage.



Kent Wong and Larry Frank, from the UCLA Labor Center, tell us the LA County Fed has 345 affiliates and over 800,000 members. While on the decline nationally, union membership has grown in Southern California. The Teacher's, Nurse's and Fireman's unions have sent the Governor's popularity ratings into a downward spiral. Lupe Martinez is out in the fields

trying to reenergize the United Farm Workers. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers has negotiated and threatened yet another sweet deal, with LADWP, for their already highest paid workers in the State. SEIU347 head, Julie Butcher, has made herself a force at City Hall.

Unions have influenced elections, city policy and the nature and quality of our Los Angeles lives. Today, with the union movement at a crossroads nationally, LA and Southern California labor is setting precedent and providing organizing and action templates for the nation.

Organized labor in LA is not without its challenges in 2005. But, it is riding a power crest at the moment that, wisely administered should carry it well into the century. The only question, it seems, is a matter of degree. ■

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 The E-Newsletter for LA's NC's

**Citywide Edition**

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CITYWATCH is published to encourage grassroots civic engagement through information, ideas and perspective.

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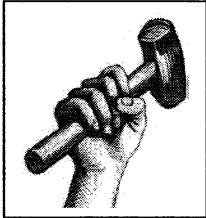
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**Insight****The Power of Organization, Creativity and Commitment: Unions 2005**

By Mark Siegel

He called it the year of reform, but a better moniker would be the mean season of politics. Governor Schwarzenegger has called a special election, costing taxpayers \$70 million, to vote on four initiatives that he felt couldn't wait for the June 2006 election. His primary goal is to silence the voice of Police, Firefighters, Nurses, Teachers Unions and other public employees.



save this funding.

Why he wants to emasculate these workers is plain to see. Teachers have called him out on his broken promise to repay \$2 billion earmarked by Proposition 98 funds for schools. One of the Governor's initiatives, Prop 76, effectively repeals the guaranteed commitment to our schools. Thanks to the teachers we have a chance to

**Nurses Have Impact**

He has proposed rolling back the nurse/patient ratio in publicly funded hospitals. It was the Nurses Union making the public aware that this policy could have a dramatic impact on the quality of care at these hospitals.

It was Police and Firefighters Unions who found the flaw in his so-called pension plan that would deny surviving spouses and children their death benefits, causing the Governor to abandon it.

It was City and County employee unions that fought for and passed Proposition 1A last year, which brought stability to local government, protecting essential government services.

**Unions and Neighborhood Councils**

The city unions played a key role in the Charter reform debate to ensure that Neighborhood Councils remained a part of the Charter. They knew they had a common agenda with neighborhood advocates, to improve and maintain quality city services.

The Governor wants to silence the voice of public employees because they have been successful in making the public aware of the shortcomings of his policy agenda. While he is off fundraising from corporate interests, teachers, nurses, police and firefighters have made the public aware of what is really happening. Who will speak out if their voice is silenced? ■

**Report From the Front—Recommended Link****Unions At War**By David Bacon  
August 11, 2005

**SAN FRANCISCO, CA-** In Chicago's cavernous Navy Yard convention center, delegates were lined up at the four microphones scattered across the floor. San Francisco's Nancy Wohlforth stood at mic number 2. She'd been waiting for this moment for two years.

The mike went live, and she stepped forward. Wohlforth is a slight woman, but her voice cut thru the hubbub of the little conversations across the floor, stopping them dead. With the intensity and anger of a twenty-first century Mother Jones, she began to give her fellow delegates a dose of straight, unvarnished truth. (This report first appeared on ZNET. David Bacon is a noted writer. He has been covering unions for more than two decades. For the rest of Bacon's report, visit: [www.CityWatchLA.com/page6.html](http://www.CityWatchLA.com/page6.html))

"Labor Day differs in every essential way from the other holidays of the year. All other holidays are in a more or less degree connected with conflicts and battles of man's prowess over man, of strife and discord for greed and power, of glories achieved by one nation over another. Labor Day... is devoted to no man, living or dead, to no sect, race, or nation."

Samuel Gompers  
founder and longtime president of the  
American Federation of Labor.



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Birth of a Union**Pivotal Moment in Labor History:  
The Liberty Hill Incident**

By Dan Pasley

In the early evening of May 15, 1923, one of the world's pre-eminent authors, the muckraking activist Mr. Upton Sinclair, left his home in Pasadena and drove to San Pedro with his wife, Mary Craig Sinclair and his brother-in-law, Hunter Kimbrough.

Sinclair, the self identified socialist and outspoken union sympathizer, was on a mission to bring attention to the plight of striking longshoremen and the abusive behavior being wielded by LAPD Chief Louis Oaks and his "Red Squad". They were using the draconian and outmoded "Criminal Syndicalism" laws from WW1 to harass IWW (Wobbly) and other labor organizers trying to unionize the seaman and longshoremen.

**1<sup>st</sup> Amendment and the Union**

Sinclair, who had earlier hounded John Rockefeller from his office to his home in protest of the massacre at Ludlow, Colorado, was an early adapter of media manipulation. He had carefully studied the law and knew that he would be within his first amendment rights as long as he delivered his address on private property. He rented a vacant plot on a bluff overlooking the harbor in San Pedro and publicized the event, knowing that the police would be instructed by the shipowners to disrupt his free assembly. This is the place that has become known as Liberty Hill, where some estimate as many as 3000 gathered as the sun set over the working port of LA. Sinclair began to read the First Amendment aloud.

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

**Sinclair Arrested**

He did not finish it before he was jerked from the stage and marched to a waiting car. For the next four days, Sinclair and three other speakers were held incommunicado, and several hundred others were herded into makeshift jails hastily constructed from live stock pens.

In spite of a concerted effort to squelch the story it could not be contained and created an international hue and cry. Within days the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California was born and posed a major legal threat to the perpetrators, added to the power of international public opinion. Ultimately the longshoremen gained the right to organize and the Chief of Police was forced to resign. The demonstration at Liberty Hill came to be seen as a pivotal moment signaling the rebirth of the labor movement in Southern California. ■

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**LA Leads Unions-Cont from Page 1**

For one thing, Mike Garcia's reference (above) to public and political help during the three-week walkout that provided an important spark to the revitalization of the labor movement in Los Angeles was actually an understatement. The union attracted high profile support during the strike, but it was the strong local community support, in evidence at the many spirited marches and rallies that the union used to keep the fight on the public's radar that contributed most to the victory.

At the same time, the successful effort by the late Miguel Contreras, as head of the County Federation of Labor, to wield the aggregate political power of the various local unions behind one aggressive agenda, brought decisive

**Continued next column**

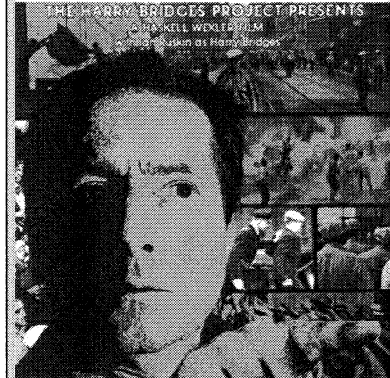
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intervention on behalf of the workers by Mayor Riordan, Cardinal Mahoney and an-up-and-coming former labor leader, then Speaker of the Assembly, Antonio Villaraigosa.

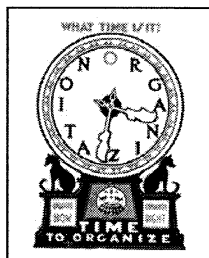
Look to unions to continue working with socially progressive community groups and fighting to keep the political vehicle they've built, even as the Governor tries to divide it from its allies and gut its political power through the November special election initiatives. The fallout from that election will determine whether labor in California will continue to lead the nation beyond the beginning of the century. ■

**Retrospective-Continued from Page 1**

During the late 1970s and 80's, the manufacturing base in Los Angeles began to shrink as factories were shut down. The most powerful unions in the County Fed were the construction trades. Politically, they worked hand in glove with Mayor Tom Bradley and private developers to build sky scraper after skyscraper. Fueled by the housing shortage and skyrocketing rent, dozens of apartment buildings, the high-rises on Wilshire in Westwood are examples, and other mega-unit Oakwood styled buildings were constructed. Century City and the Warner center in Woodland Hills were developed during this period, frequently over the strong objections of neighborhood activists. The carpenters and other construction unions were powerful voices. When added to the power of developers they were pretty much invincible. .

**Homeowner Organizations**

Eventually, through the efforts of homeowner organizations and environmentalists, some of the uncontrolled growth was reigned in. Bradley was finishing his 20-year stint as Mayor, Long-time labor leader, Bill Robertson, retired. from his post at the Country Federation of Labor.



In the wake, the influence of public employees, and their two main unions SEIU and AFSCME, began to emerge. In the mid 80's, AFSCME won a significant victory, passing a comparable worth policy for the City. Comparable worth, in effect, provided equal pay for men and women with similar jobs and qualifications.

Enter Richard Riordon, who campaigned for Mayor by pledging to privatize city services. Garbage collection would be first.. This mobilized organized labor once again, particularly city workers. Things were further polarized when the DWP workers, represented by IBEW, went on strike. The unions played the Council against the Mayor and effectively blocked the Mayor's privatization budget. Then labor played a key role in the charter reform effort, protecting the checks and balances in the charter as well as supporting the concept of neighborhood councils.

**Contreras Takes Charge**

At the County Fed, Miguel Contreras took over the leadership. As the first Hispanic to serve in that position, ideologically a progressive, Contreras built the federation into a lean political machine. As a result, the County Federation of Labor emerged as one of the most important voices in local politics. They played a key role in the election of council members in cities throughout the County. The same applied to Congressional members and state legislators. Its endorsement was as good as gold for a candidate

Contreras' philosophy was to walk a tightrope between the demands of the public employee unions and the private sector unions. But, that approach came to a head when the city employee locals, along with the building trades, supported Jim Hahn for Mayor in 2001 and the rest of the labor unions in the city went for Antonio Villaraigosa.

**Industrial Jobs Disappear**

The challenge didn't end there. As industrial jobs disappeared, SEIU began to organize the service sector. Newly organized workers included County Homecare, followed by the Justice for Janitors campaign. Since representation on the County Federation's Executive Board is based on the number of members a particular union has, SEIU became the 100 pound gorilla, controlling about 35% the votes for endorsing candidates and other Fed activities. They also contributed the same percentage of the dues paid to the fed.

*Continued on Page 6. See "Retrospective"*

**Snapshots**

*"Justice for Janitors:*

*Janitors Victory*

*Galvanizes Workers*

*Across The Nation"*

Nancy Cleeland,  
LA Times, April 25, 2000



**"Rebirth of Union Activism:**

**Los Angeles Leads America**

**Back"**

Duncan Campbell  
Manchester Guardian, 2000



*"Ceasar Chavez was a  
very charismatic leader,  
who headed a movement  
that used only nonviolent  
tactics."*

Karen McCarthy  
House of Representatives, 1998



**"Homecare Workers**

**Win a Big One**

**In Los Angeles"**

LRA Online, 1999



**Special CityWatch Report**

**VICTIMS OF HURRICAN KATRINA**

The Los Angeles City Council will take up an emergency motion on Tuesday, September 6 aimed at providing assistance and aid to the victims of the hurricane Katrina tragedy in the Gulf States.

There is likely that Neighborhood Councils will be called on for help.

Check the DONE website for developing details: [www.lacityneighborhoods.com](http://www.lacityneighborhoods.com)

Retrospective-Continued from Page 5.

With SEIU's split this year, from the AFL-CIO, they are no longer members of the County Fed. Further, the President of the Fed, Rick Icaza, heads the local United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) which also left the AFL. Now, he must give up his leadership position.

The rumble of change continued with the sudden death of Contreras and the hiring of Los Angeles City Councilman Martin Ludlow to head the Fed.

**November Initiatives**

Add to the mix, the election of now Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, along with his anti-public employee initiatives, and you have the makings of yet another major challenge for LA's organized labor force.

Who is left standing in November will be a sure sign of the power of labor today ... or, of the silencing one of the major progressive advocates in the city. ■

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**SEPTEMBER 11**

**PORT SECURITY FORUM  
& Dock-U-Mentary Film Festival**

**11:00 AM Banana Wars**

Multi Media Presentation by Harry Bridges Institute Summer interns

**12 NOON Port Security Forum**

Presentations & Panel Discussion with Homeland Security, Port of LA, First Responders and Elected Officials. Sponsored by NC Committee on Port Safty & Security.

**2:00 PM Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price** by Robert Greenwald  
Sneak Preview of New Documentary. See it in full on November 18 at Warner Grand!

**2:30 PM Answering the Call** an inspiring tribute to the union firemen, nurses and policemen who served in search & rescue at Ground Zero!

**4:30 PM Hijacking Catastrophe 9/11, Fear & the Selling of American Empire**  
Documentary research and commentary by Tariq Ali, Noam Chomsky, Medea Benjamin, Ben Barber, Norman Mailer, Daniel Ellsberg, Chalmers Johnson, Scott Ritter, Stan Goff

**6:00 PM: Stan Goff** Author of Full Spectrum Disorder and former Military Instructor at West Point and Special Ops soldier in Vietnam, El Savador, Colombia, etc.

**7:00 PM Sneak Prevue** Special Screening of feature by Academy Award Winning Cinematographer. Cannot publicize name, but deals with legendary labor hero!

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**September 6, 2005**

**CITYWATCH: KNOW MORE**

## A Labor Day Message from UTLA

*Representing the 47,000 teachers and health & human services professionals of Los Angeles Unified School District*

# STRONG UNIONS MAKE STRONG COMMUNITIES

You'll see the union difference at work in your neighborhood schools and in your children's future.



At United Teachers Los Angeles, we believe in the union difference--better lives for working families and the communities they live in. Our new leadership is committed to making UTLA a vibrant, cutting-edge, proactive union. A union that will fight for better lives for our members... and a better quality of life in the communities in which we work.

## Vision for UTLA

This Labor Day, we share with you our **Ten Point Plan** to organize, mobilize, and revitalize our union.

1. Cap and reduce class size
2. Raise salaries and maintain and improve health care benefits
3. Make educators the driving force behind curriculum programs and pacing plans
4. Cut the LAUSD bureaucracy and adequately fund the classroom and school site
5. Vigorously defend teachers, students, and public education from attack
6. Provide the necessary resources to ensure safe schools
7. Build enduring labor/community relationships and coalitions to defend public education
8. Hold politicians accountable
9. Build partnerships with LAUSD from a position of strength.
10. Organize and mobilize for a stronger UTLA.

**A.J. Duffy**, President  
**Lois Bradford**, UTLA/NEA VP / UTLA/NEA Affiliate President  
**Josh Pechthalt**, UTLA/AFT VP / AFT Local 1021 President  
**Julie Washington**, Elementary Vice President  
**Linda Guthrie**, Secondary Vice President  
**Ana Valencia**, Secretary  
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