

No Human Being is Illegal.

JwJ is fighting
for better
working and
living conditions
for immigrants,
documented or
not.



2000/01

The U.S. economy is changing: While corporations export manufacturing jobs, they are increasingly dependent on importing low-wage immigrant labor. In the past, U.S. and foreign workers have often been pitted against each other, and racism and immigrant bashing have divided workers domestically to the advantage of corporations. Now, *Jobs with Justice*, along with many others, is bridging between the labor movement and immigrant rights groups as we explore strategies to fight for better living and working conditions for all immigrant workers, regardless of their legal status. The following pages highlight some of the problems immigrants are facing, as well as some of our recent campaigns and successes.

National Day of Action for a general amnesty!

Many Jobs with Justice activists came out on October 14, 2000, to demand a general amnesty for undocumented workers in the U.S. The national day of action was organized by the **National Coalition for Dignity and Amnesty for Undocumented Immigrants**, representing more than 200 organizations, unions, and churches. An estimated 6.5 million

undocumented people, most of them from Latin America, have come to this country, many fleeing dictatorships and wars. Others came for the prospect of decent pay, job security, and health care, like generations of immigrants have before them. They often work in below-minimum wage jobs or as day laborers, lacking health care and even the most fundamental workers' rights. Their insecure legal status makes them prone to exploitation and firings, practices that open the door for attacks on the salaries, benefits, and

rights of all workers. JwJ coalitions have been helping to gather signatures for a declaration demanding a general amnesty for undocumented workers. The declaration can be found on the internet at <http://www.tepeyac.org/amnistia/index.html>. Here are highlights from two of the October 2000 amnesty demonstrations JwJ activists participated in, followed by some examples of campaigns in which JwJ has been working closely with immigrants:



Portland, OR: JwJ activists came out for a powerful rally on October 14 in support of a general amnesty.

Photo: Nick Mikatich

Portland, OR

Led by Aztec dancers and union members carrying banners, one thousand people supporting a general amnesty for undocumented workers marched through the streets of downtown Portland. The message of Portland's Labor March for Amnesty also included defending the Right to Organize and a call to defeat two anti-labor initiatives on the November ballot. The march ended with a rally opposite the Federal Building, which was emceed by Cyndy Chan, co-chair of Portland Jobs with Justice, and featured speakers from four local unions (**United Brotherhood of Carpenters Local 2331, SEIU Local 49, HERE Local 9, and International Union of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 5**) who are actively organizing immigrant workers. Other speakers included representatives of the **AFL-CIO, CAUSA** (the statewide immigrant rights coalition), **VOZ** (a day laborers organization), **St. Francis Catholic Church**, and the **American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)**.

Jerry Atkin, Portland Jobs with Justice

New York, NY

"What an inspiring and moving event! I was part of a sizeable delegation from the Boston area — 3 busloads full — that joined 10,000 other marchers on a route that took us across New York from the West Side to the UN Plaza on the East Side. This was truly a coalition effort in Massachusetts, as a number of groups pulled together to get their members to New York. Among those groups sending representatives were Jobs with Justice, **Immigrant Workers Resource Center, the Ana Maria D'Hora Brazilian Workers Center, the Brazilian Center of Brighton, El Centro Latino, East Boston Ecumenical Center, Merrimack Valley Project and City Life/La Vida Urbana**. The most exciting part of the trip for me was not the march - but the bus ride to and from. Getting to know folks from parts of the labor movement whom I've only seen in passing was something I will treasure for years to come." Elly Leary, UAW 2324

Haitian nursing home workers fight for Right to Organize in Boston!

Since 1998, Haitian nursing home workers in the Boston area have been trying to gain union representation with **SEIU Local 285**. The nursing homes are operated by national for-profit chains. Workers complained about understaffing and unfair



Over 300 marched and 32 got arrested on September 26, 2000, as they blocked a busy downtown street in Washington, DC in a protest organized by Jobs with Justice and others. The rally supported mostly immigrant parking garage workers whose Right to Organize with HERE Local 27 has been denied by 'Interparking', their employer. **Photo: Maura Browne**

treatment from management, as well as low pay and poor benefits, especially health insurance. But the Haitian workers were also specifically targeted as immigrants: They were subjected to racist anti-Haitian comments by supervisors and in several instances were banned from speaking Creole at work.

Traditionally, the leadership of the Massachusetts labor movement has been largely white and with some exceptions without deep ties to local communities of color. Jobs with Justice was able to make a contribution toward overcoming this division by forming a coalition with local Haitian community leaders and having material printed in Haitian Creole. The campaign was able to tap into the tightly knit and well-organized Haitian community with its own radio station and newspaper. Haitian community leaders and clergy wasted no time lending their full support to the workers' cause. The **Somerville Haitian Coalition, the Haitian Multiservice Center, the Haitian-American Public Health Initiative, the Association of Haitian Women in Boston**, and several predominantly Haitian parishes were among the most important partners.

When several nursing home workers were fired for their organizing activity, Jobs with Justice organized community leaders to come out on their behalf. A speak-out against the nursing home's actions got coverage in the two major Boston papers and forced

management to call the workers back to work within a week. Subsequently, with JwJ support, four Boston area nursing homes with predominantly Haitian workers were organized and all four have since signed contracts improving wages, benefits, and working conditions. Most recently, at Courtyard Nursing Care Center in Medford, MA, seventeen fired workers were returned and a contract signed after a campaign to build public pressure.

Latino janitors in Denver achieve better working conditions!

Last summer, Colorado Jobs with Justice gave strong support to a successful **SEIU Local 105 Justice for Janitors** campaign. The vast majority of the 2000 Denver area janitors are first generation Latino immigrants. JwJ Workers' Rights Board (WRB) members from city council and clergy opened the first contract negotiation session by offering words of encouragement to everyone assembled, including 100 janitors and representatives from 8 companies.

Jobs with Justice helped increase the pressure by organizing weekly rallies, which grew from 100 people in the first week to over four hundred by the last. JwJ turned out students from Boulder, members from the **Carpenters, CWA, UFCW retirees, AFSC, SOS8**, and activists from many other organizations. On September 26, 2000, the international day of action protesting the World Bank and IMF Annual Meeting in Prague, more than 350 people marched with whistles, drums, and banners to the Federal Reserve, one of the places where the janitors clean.

Two days later, more than 400 people turned out for the final rally before contract expiration, and on Friday, in a "Politicians' Day", many Latino representatives came out, including City Council member Debbie Ortega, a representative from City Council member Ramona Martinez's office, and Don Mares, City Auditor. On Saturday, when the contract was finally due to expire, all 6 firms in question came back and gave the workers virtually everything they were demanding. Wages were raised to \$8 per hour, and a plan was set up to turn most of these part-time jobs into full-time positions, making this one of the best janitors' contracts in the country.

Coalition rallies to support immigrant workers in New Bedford, MA!

Jobs with Justice helped to organize a labor-community delegation to Kyler Sea Food, one of New Bedford's oldest fish processing plants, to demand an end to worker abuse. While historically jobs at the fish houses had better wages and working conditions than the textile and garment industries, today the majority of workers are immigrants, mostly

AFL-CIO issues strong new stand on immigration

In February, 2000, the AFL-CIO Executive Council came out in favor of an amnesty for undocumented immigrants, recognizing their growing importance in many sectors of the economy and acknowledging that workers must not be divided along the lines of race, ethnicity, or nationality. Here are excerpts from the statement:

* Undocumented workers and their families make enormous contributions to their communities and workplaces and should be provided permanent legal status through a new amnesty program.

* Immigrant workers should have full workplace rights in order to protect their own interests as well as the labor rights of all American workers.

* Immigrant workers...deserve the basic safety net protections that all other workers enjoy. The AFL-CIO continues to support the full restoration of benefits that were unfairly taken away through Federal legislation in 1996, causing tremendous harm to immigrant families.

(The full text can be obtained at <http://www.afl-cio.org/>)

Mayan Indians from Guatemala, working for very low wages and in deplorable working conditions. The action at Kyler's was planned when workers came forward to the Community Economic Development Center with repeated complaints about an abusive supervisor. The coalition included **CEDC, UFCW 326, UNITE, the New Bedford CLC, the Organization Maya K'ichee** and the **American Indian Friends Coalition**. The delegation presented the workers' and the community's demands to management; excellent TV and newspaper coverage increased public support and pressure on Kyler's. Demands of disciplining the supervisor and distributing a no-violence policy were met and workers, bolstered by the victories and the community support are coming forward for more collective action. While JwJ continues to organize community support, the coalition has developed a 'Fairness Standard in the Fish-Processing Industry', and the UFCW is pursuing an organizing campaign with the workers.

WRB weighs in for undocumented workers in Tucson!

In the fall of 2000, the Tucson Area Workers' Rights Board (a project of **SAAEJ** and Jobs with Justice) fielded multiple calls from immigrant workers with complaints of not getting paid for cleaning work they

did in a Tucson Wal-Mart store. Upon investigation, the WRB exposed a small cleaning business that recruited undocumented workers, counting on their lack of papers to mean they wouldn't speak up about such abuses. Calls like this come into the Tucson WRB hotline all the time, but in this case, a group of 19 workers was willing to stick together and with the WRB's help, take the risk and fight. With the help (and prodding!) of Workers Rights Board member Isabel Garcia of the **Derechos Humanos Coalition**, the Attorney General's office has filed lawsuits against J and V Cleaning for discrimination based on nation of origin and to get the workers' 3 times their lost wages!

Fighting discrimination against immigrant day laborers in Chicago!

As 'contingent workers', immigrant day laborers are part of a rapidly growing segment of the economy. Day laborers line up each morning at agencies in hope of receiving a work assignment at a factory, warehouse, or construction site, performing manual labor such as assembly or unloading trucks. Needless to say, they lack benefits such as vacation, retirement, and health insurance. The **Chicago Day Labor Organizing Project** (DLOP) is a collaboration of the **Chicago Coalition for the Homeless** (CCH), the **Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues** (CICWI), the **Center for Urban Economic Development** at the University of Illinois, and Chicago Jobs with Justice (JwJ). JwJ's specific focus is to get organized labor to support the struggle of unorganized day laborers and to build community support for the watchdog committee that is overseeing temp and day labor agencies.

DLOP was able to uncover numerous discriminatory practices in day labor agencies directed against women, people of color, and the many immigrants whose livelihood depends on day labor. Immigrant day laborers are more likely to be exploited due to cultural and language barriers and their insecure legal status. Many are undocumented, meaning that they can be deported from the U.S. Some agencies will send out undocumented workers and then refuse to pay them at the end of the day. If these workers complain, the dispatcher threatens to call the INS, the federal immigration authority, on them.

Broken Immigration Laws

"Our immigration laws are broken and need fixing. It's bad enough that immigration laws have long incited employment discrimination; when it also becomes clear that the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) is being used to suppress wages, encourage unsafe working conditions, and undermine union organizing, something is very wrong. Immigration enforcement was supposed to be a shield defending labor rights; instead, it has become a sword used by unethical employers to undercut the rights of all workers."

National Coalition for Dignity and Amnesty for Undocumented Immigrants

<http://www.tepeyac.org/amnistia/index.html>

Recently, another exploitative practice surfaced and was resolved with a victory at the Trojan Temporary Agency in Humboldt Park. After talks with the agency's president, the firm lowered the transportation fees that it collects from day workers to the level prescribed by state law, saving workers up to \$3 a day.

JwJ organizes community support for Latino poultry workers in Kentucky!

Workers at Cagle-Keystone in Clinton County, KY, organized an election to gain representation by the United Food and Commercial Workers (**UFCW Local 227**). However, in the midst of the organizing campaign, the predominantly Latino workers were harassed by local police and INS officials. In one week alone, 14 Latino workers were detained at a roadblock on their way to work, while others were reportedly arrested walking down the street in Albany and Monticello, KY. There is rising concern that the civil, human, and labor rights of persons detained are not being respected. Yet another case of a corporation exploiting the vulnerability of undocumented workers and threatening their Right to Organize? JwJ mobilized support for a Latino festival and rally on December 2, 2000, collecting more than 300 coats for men, women, and children, and dozens of boxes of clothing. On December 8, 2000, 1500 Cagle-Keystone poultry workers voted overwhelmingly for the union and JwJ will continue to support them until they have won their first contract.

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