

contributed to other organizations now recognizing the justice of our demand, most prominently, the Catholic Church and the AFL-CIO. Our public actions revealed the existence of a growing immigrant rights movement that is organized and ready to take to the streets with its demands.

Furthermore, in February 2001 Congressman Gutierrez (D-IL) introduced the first bill for a general legalization of undocumented immigrants. This bill is a very important first step towards the solution of the problems faced by immigrants and their families.

While we keep building our base, this coming year we will prioritize the work of building broader coalitions with all other organizations fighting for a new legalization program. At the same time, it is also crucial to build alliances with other social justice movements outside the immigrant communities. This broader base of support will put us in a better position to educate our congressional representatives and the public about the justice of our demands and how this ultimately will help build a better society for all.

New immigrants can and will reenergize the labor movement, but only if the labor movement responds to the needs and demands of immigrant workers. Both the AFL-CIO and LCLAA have taken important first steps to respond to these demands. We encourage both to continue on in this direction. *Hasta la victoria!*

3.B.12.

Coalition of Immokalee Workers

From “Consciousness + Commitment = Change” (2003)

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is a community-based worker organization based in Florida, with members who include Latinx, Haitian, and Mayan Indian immigrants. It takes its name from Immokalee, FL, where the state’s tomato and citrus industries are based. The following excerpt details the CIW’s powerful organizing at the intersection of immigrant organizing, labor, and the global justice movement, even in the absence of labor protections.

... As the CIW motto goes: “Consciousness + Commitment = Change,” and popular education, in many forms, is the way CIW members build consciousness among their fellow workers.

Popular education is a method of education and organization born in the countryside of Brazil and developed in struggles throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Several of the CIW’s original founders not only had experience with popular education but were trained practitioners of the approach through their community organizations at home. At its heart is the use of

“codes”—drawings, theater, song, video, stories, and so forth—designed to capture a piece of community reality and to present that reality for reflection in a group. . . .

The objective of popular education is to oblige workers to confront the problems in their community in a form that allows, and in fact actively encourages, even the most reticent workers to participate. . . . By making political analysis understandable and facilitating the group reflection in a way that brings peripheral members to the center of the process, it challenges workers to abandon their apathy and isolation, to actively analyze their reality, and to redefine their relationship to the forces that shape their lives. It is education for action, and as such its effectiveness must ultimately be measured by the degree to which it moves the community to take action, fight for change, and win a degree of control over its collective destiny.

Leadership development as practiced in the CIW’s work also draws its inspiration from the Latin American and Caribbean organizing experience. In Immokalee, farmworkers interested in sharpening their leadership skills and learning new tools for working with the community can participate in intensive workshops, lasting from two to seven days, where workers study and practice everything from techniques of popular education to the history of the labor movement, labor, and human rights, how to plan and run community meetings, the practice of popular theater, economic and political analysis, and even techniques of video production. Participation in the CIW leadership development process is self-selected and is open to any and all members, from the longest-term veterans to the most recently arrived workers, as one of its primary goals is to constantly broaden the leadership base of the organization. In that way, the CIW is best able to counter the erosion of that base caused by the movement of even the most dedicated leaders out of Immokalee toward better, more stable employment.

CIW staff is composed of workers elected by their fellow workers at the annual general assembly. . . . Staff members get hands-on training in important new skills and gain insight into the world of organizing in the United States, including the use of computer technology (through email and the CIW website), the ins and outs of the US political system, press outreach, and fundraising. To guarantee that those elected to the staff remain rooted in farmworker reality, however, CIW members established several key organizational bylaws. Staff salaries are commensurate with farmworker wages, the staff structure is nonhierarchical, and staff members are required to spend a significant amount of time every year working in the fields. . . .

In a certain sense, it can be said that the CIW has made a virtue of necessity in two important ways, both of which are made necessary by the high turnover of the Immokalee community. Because every season—every month, even—brings a significant percentage of new workers to Immokalee, the CIW can never abandon the basic political education process (popular education) that informs [workers] and motivates them to become active CIW members. And because even the most committed leaders inevitably move on to better work in

distant states or back home to their families in Mexico, Guatemala, and Haiti, the CIW must maintain a constant process of leadership development to grow and replenish its leadership base.

From this base, the CIW has organized various high-profile, aggressive, successful actions since 1995. The first major, community-wide action came as a response to the beatings and abuse of workers in the field, which in the early nineties was a widespread practice by many local contractors. When a worker who had been beaten for drinking water without permission came to the coalition with his ripped and bloodied shirt, we responded with a five-hundred-person March to End Violence to the home of the contractor who had perpetrated such a heinous act. Since that time the reports of such intolerable abuses in the Immokalee area have come to an end. Actions since 1995 have included three community-wide general strikes, a thirty-day hunger strike by six CIW members ended by the intervention of former president Jimmy Carter, a two-week, 240-mile march across south and central Florida, and now a national boycott of Taco Bell, a major buyer of tomatoes picked in Immokalee.

The centerpiece of the boycott to date has been the Taco Bell Truth Tour, a cross-country bus and van tour from Florida to California by seventy workers and thirty students, with stops for rallies and protests in major cities across the way in March 2002. The fifteen-city, seventeen-day tour culminated in massive protests—bringing together allies from across the spectrum, including students, anarchists, labor, community, and religious organizations—in Los Angeles and Irvine, California, home of Taco Bell's corporate headquarters. It was the first major "convergence style" action directed at an individual corporation, resulting in a historic first-time meeting between executives of a multinational fast-food corporation and the farmworkers who produce the raw materials for their products.

Because farm workers are exempted from the NLRA, the CIW has had to carry on the tradition of high-profile actions that have become typical of farmworker organizing since the fasts and marches of Cesar Chavez and the UFW [United Farm Workers] in the 1960s and 1970s. Without access to NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] mediation and the more rational, democratic means of an election/appeals process to compel employers to the table, farmworkers have little choice but to use spectacular protests to bring public pressure to bear on the industry for the right to negotiate for better wages and working conditions.

But the CIW also looks at these actions as opportunities for further conscientization and leadership development and thus strives to shape its actions so as to maximize those opportunities. . . .

The hunger strike of 1997–98, for example, was a historic, month-long political statement by six tomato pickers, supported by a committee of several other members that watched over the strikers twenty-four hours a day. . . . Similarly, CIW strikes have not been specific to one grower but have involved the entire community and have taken on the industry as a whole. This is in part due to the community labor pool structure of the labor market in Immokalee but also

to the CIW's casting of grievances in political as well as economic terms. Because CIW members generally understand and define strikes within the broader framework of human rights, strike actions tend to become events that galvanize the entire community and challenge the basic assumptions of agriculture's oppressive power structure. CIW marches also follow this pattern, with the routes covering several days or even weeks of ten- to twenty-mile stretches by day, followed by public meetings and internal reflections by night. The marches, like most CIW actions, have been radicalizing experiences that cement bonds between members and do much to counteract the forces that atomize the Im-mokalee community and contribute to its unequalled transience. . . .

The Taco Bell Truth Tour is an example of the emphasis on long-duration, participatory tactics. Furthermore, the decision to explicitly link the boycott to the broader movement for global justice, through the focus on building strong ties to the youth and radical sectors that have been at the forefront of that movement and through the "convergence style" actions in front of Taco Bell headquarters, reflects the conscious effort on the part of the CIW to place the farmworkers' struggle firmly within the growing debate over globalization, corporate responsibility, and human and economic rights. . . .

For workers forced from their countries by economic and political conditions linked, in large part, to World Bank and IMF [International Monetary Fund] policies, workers who find themselves now in the United States exploited by a major multinational corporation that profits directly from their poverty, the leap from general strikes in the tomato fields to global mobilizations for economic justice like those in Seattle, Washington, and Genoa, is not a difficult one.