ORAL TESTIMONIES OF MEXICAN WORKERS WHO ORGANIZED THE
SONOMA COUNTY INDUSTRIAL UNION: QUE ES UN BOTON?

by

Laura Larqué

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Dr. Daniel Markwyn, Chair

Dr. Dennis Harris

Dr. Francisco Vázquez

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Oral Testimonies of Mexican Workers who Organized the Sonoma County Industrial Union: Que es un Boton?

Creative Project by Laura Larqué

ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study:

To document the struggle that Mexican workers from Calliope Designs and Point St. George Fisheries launched in 1988, to obtain union representation.

Procedure:

Oral interviews were conducted with workers of both plants, union organizers, and community members to document the formation of Sonoma County Industrial Union.

Findings:


Conclusions:

The organizing efforts of these Mexican workers appeared to have a social and political rippling influences on issues affecting Mexicans in Sonoma County.

Chair:

Dr. Daniel Markwyn

Date: 1-6-99

IV
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The story of the courageous Mexican women and men of Sonoma County Industrial Union interests me greatly, personally and professionally. As a Mexican woman, born and raised in México City, I feel the issues affecting Mexican workers in the United States need to be addressed.

I come from a working class background. In his late fifties my father became actively involved in union organizing at his workplace, which led to the termination of his job. Suddenly, he found himself old, unskilled, and without employment. I found myself reflecting on my father and his experience as I documented the experiences of the SCIU workers. Ultimately, some of the Calliope Designs and Point St. George Fisheries workers faced a situation similar to my father's.

I thought I knew a lot about Mexicans, being Mexican myself. These workers are my teachers, and I learned a great deal not only about their struggle, but about our shared culture and heritage. I want others to learn the story of these courageous workers, who speak so eloquently of their struggle and their lives.
Introduction

In 1988, Mexican workers at Calliope Designs and Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF) launched a struggle to obtain union representation. The workers' efforts resulted in the formation of the Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU). This project documents the circumstances of the union's origin, its brief but vibrant existence, and its subsequent demise. The heart of the project are the workers' perspectives of their experiences, documented in oral interviews conducted three years after the official demise of SCIU.

It is important to record the workers' struggle to unionize, particularly because it has not previously been documented with the exception of a series of newspaper articles which appeared in The Press Democrat during the period of the union's existence. Mexican labor history in Sonoma County has not been a primary subject of study for historians, and there is a need for the struggle of these people to be recorded not only for them, but for their children, for the Mexican community, and for the community at large.

The specific focus of this project is to document the workers' experiences, and it is not intended to document the
history of the union as a whole. Therefore, workers are the principal interview subjects. Several additional interviews with non-workers were conducted to add other key perspectives.

The technique of the oral interview was chosen in this project. The oral interview has been used to great benefit in many instances. Elena Poniatwoska, a famous Mexican writer and historian, relied on oral interviews for her works on the Mexican Revolution, the Mexican Student Movement of 1968, and the history of urban guerrillas in Mexico City. In the United States, the oral interview has been a fertile methodology for contemporary Chicano historians, many of whom have obtained invaluable results in their research. Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith utilized the methodology of the oral interview for her research on the history of Mexicanas in the United States. Rubio-Goldsmith stated:

Specific to the history of Mexicanas, oral interviews, their preservation, and transcription are emerging as primary-source material as a self-standing oral document that preserves recollection and memories of a collective and as a creation of a new historical document that views the interview as a totality including the interviewer.¹

The oral interview has also been utilized by United States historians in varied applications. Wallace Terry in his book *Bloods: An Oral History of The Vietnam War By Black Veterans*, presents twenty interviews he conducted with Vietnam Veterans. Terry does not explain his methodology to any appreciable degree, and the seemingly candid interviews stand alone. Yet, they provide profound insight into how soldiers, sailors, and officers of the United States Army and Navy experienced the Vietnam War. The reader is exposed to personal perspectives of the Vietnam War through the recollections of these Black soldiers and officers.²

Studs Terkel is a prolific writer who has made an extraordinary contribution to United States history through his use of the oral interview. This contribution is clearly reflected in his works, which include *American Dreams Lost and Found, Born to Live: Hiroshima, Working, and Chicago*.

In his book, *Working*, Terkel presents a wide variety of interviews with working people. He conducted his interviews with people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, and different types of employment. His goal was to learn how workers feel

about their daily work and about themselves. *Working* is an interesting book that documents how workers felt about their jobs during the 1970's in the United States.\(^3\)

Research into the importance of oral history provided a valuable background for conducting the oral interviews for this project. The process of interviewing union workers, organizers, and community members served to refresh people’s memories leading to other sources: newspaper articles, photographs, union buttons and shirts.

The first interviews conducted were with the two union organizers, Alicia Sanchez and Newman Strawbridge. They were involved with the workers and the union from the beginning of the organizing efforts. Sanchez continued as union organizer until its demise, and Strawbridge left the union in the winter of 1991. These interviews provided a comprehensive historical perspective on the union. Many hours were spent with Sanchez reconstructing her memories of the history of the union. Sanchez was always available to tape the interviews despite her busy schedule as a new

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mother. Her newborn boy was only two or three weeks old when
the interview process began.

Unfortunately, Strawbridge's schedule was problematic. He
granted only one interview, and after that he became unavailable
due to his work schedule. The inability to interview Strawbridge
led to a reliance on the information provided by Sanchez, workers,
community members, and The Press Democrat articles in which
Strawbridge was often quoted.

Most of the workers responded enthusiastically to the
initial contact requesting an interview. Several workers
expressed their feelings that their effort to form a union was part
of making history in the United States, and therefore needed to be
recorded. Most of the workers were candid and open in their
answers and accommodated the interviews in their busy family and
working schedules. The interviews were conducted in a
professional manner, yet with an ease that made the process
comfortable for both interviewee and interviewer.

The Anglo and Latino community members contacted also
readily agreed to be interviewed. In general, these people were
happy that the workers' experiences were going to be documented to preserve this chapter of Mexican history in Sonoma County.

These courageous workers risked their jobs and their families' livelihoods and homes. For many of them, even their continued residency in the United States was at risk. Nevertheless, they were determined to organize a union that would guarantee their working rights and gain for them the respect they knew they deserved from their employers.

The great majority of the workers lacked an understanding of the legal system in this country. They launched their campaign for a union election with the belief that the government of the United States supports and protects workers' rights. According to Sanchez:

> Workers had an incredible trust in United States laws and in lawyers, without realizing that [the laws of] the United States are not interpreted to [necessarily] protect workers. Their first instinct is to trust that the laws are going to protect them. Then, later on, they discover that this is not true [all the time].

Despite the many obstacles enumerated above, these workers initiated a Latino labor movement in Sonoma County that sparked

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the awakening of a dormant social group that had long been ignored by peace groups and unions in the county. In the course of the workers' struggle, these same peace groups and labor unions became very supportive of those previously overlooked.

Several steps were taken in documenting the interviews for this project. All interviews were tape recorded in English or in Spanish, and the tapes are preserved intact. The union organizers and community members were interviewed in English. Those interviews were transcribed verbatim. All of the workers' interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated into English. The transcriptions from Spanish to English were done with attention to language, grammar, and structural differences, with an emphasis on the clear communication of the workers' thoughts. Minor editing was done to improve grammar and clarity, and to eliminate redundancy. Finally, the tapes were divided into four main categories for purposes of organization and presentation: union organizers, Calliope Designs workers, Point Saint George Fisheries workers, and members of the Anglo and Latino community.
The first section of this project will establish the historical context of the formation of SCIU and its four to five years of existence. The interviews, as the central part of this project, will be presented entirely in the second section. The third section presents supporting materials and documents.
1. Calliope Designs

In January of 1988, on Martin Luther King Day, a historic event occurred at Calliope Designs, a Christmas dough-ornament factory in Santa Rosa, California. Workers, in the majority Mexican women, decided to take matters into their own hands as they searched for a solution to the poor working conditions they had experienced for years.

The great majority of the employees worked for piece rate wages making Christmas ornaments. By comparison to workers in other local factories, the Calliope workers generally had earned more per hour by working that way. However, over the two to three year period prior to 1988, the owners Dorr and Stephanie Eddy had reduced the piece rate wage structure several times without prior announcement. The wage reductions and the cavalier manner of the owners was upsetting to the workers. In early January 1988, workers were notified of the latest wage reduction by way of a small notice posted next to the public telephone. The notice listed the ornaments for which the piece rate was going to be reduced.

Workers requested a meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Eddy in order to discuss these wage cuts. According to the workers, the Eddys
were unavailable for a meeting. Maria Pulido, a bilingual worker, relaid to the workers that Mr. Eddy felt it was time for the company to make money, and not only the workers, and that the patron [company Owner] had enough of the workers making more money than the company. Now it was the company's turn to make money. So he started reducing the pay in the ornaments by ten, or twenty cents a piece. So, can you imagine? Twenty cents multiplied by eight [$1.60], it was a lot of money that we were losing on only one ornament.  

According to Mario Jimenez, the working conditions were extremely poor. In addition to the wage cuts, workers received no health benefits, paid holidays, or sick days. Workers ate while they worked, under the pressure of the piece rate system. They were paid only for what they produced. The Calliope workers routinely used paints, lacquer, flour, and dyes in production without protective masks or adequate ventilation.

Other factors also affected the work environment. Several of the workers had been employed by Calliope Designs for more than ten years. It saddened them when the company started growing and Mr. and Mrs. Eddy removed themselves from the production floor to

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1 Mario Jimenez, interview by author, 13 December 1995, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 4.
2 Mario Jimenez, 13 December 1995, p. 4.
3 Mario Jimenez, 13 December 1995, p. 5.
focus entirely on the administration of the company. Several of the workers mentioned in their interviews that when the company was small, Mr. Eddy would work side-by-side with them and talk to them in a friendly, almost family-like manner. Workers became accustomed to that familiarity and missed the friendly communication they previously had with the company owners.

The company was growing and in April, 1979, moved to a larger facility on Tesconi Drive in Santa Rosa. Subsequently, the company hired inexperienced supervisors who did not speak Spanish and were of Anglo background. Many workers questioned why Mr. Eddy did not offer the position to any of them, who had been working there for several years and who knew the ornament production well. Several workers mentioned that even though not all of them were fluent in English, there was one Chicana, Maria Pulido, who spoke fluent English and Spanish, and the position was not offered to her.4

Workers wanted the company owners to meet with them to discuss the concerns outlined above: piece rate reductions, benefits, and supervision. On Monday, January 18, 1988, Martin

Luther King Day, all of them reported to the workplace, but they did not work. They were upset because they knew it was a holiday, their children were not in school, and yet they did not have the day off. Workers organized a sit-down work stoppage reminiscent of those employed in the auto and steel industries in the 1930's. According to the workers interviewed, they did not know of the significance of Martin Luther King Day, nor did they know the history of his role in this country's civil rights movement. Their choice of the day and the tactic employed for their job action was purely coincidental.\(^5\)

Sara Ochoa, a Calliope Designs worker, spoke about the events with a clear low-pitched voice. She would laugh and gesture with her arms when she described events or people that were favorable to the workers' cause. When she talked about the company owner, her voice changed to a high pitch, and she would cross her arms as though to protect herself. Ochoa was born in Michoacan, Mexico, and immigrated to California at the age of twenty-four. She had never worked in her native land, nor did she have union organizing experience. Ochoa started working at

\(^5\) Alicia Sanchez, interview by author, 6 October 1995, tape recording, Sebastopol, California, transcription, p. 4.
Calliope Designs in August 18, 1978, ten years before the union organizing began. Ochoa remembers their sit-in on Monday, January 18, 1988, Martin Luther King Day with extraordinary clarity.

While she offered another cup of coffee, Ochoa looked out her kitchen window and laughed, remembering the sit-down. She explained that

we went inside the company, but we were not going to work. We all decided to do that. We walked into the shop, and Lupe Farias, the woman who prepared the masa [dough] had everything ready for us to start making the ornaments. We had cutters and everything ready, but we did not work.

They asked us: 'What is happening? Why are you not taking your masa?' We told them: 'We are not going to work, we are going to drink coffee, and we want to talk to the patrones ...We only said that we wanted to talk to the patrones. The supervisors called the patrones and told them that the workers did not want to work. So we were there, just drinking and drinking coffee, but we did not work. Finally, the patrones came and talked to us.6

The workers and the company owner did not reach any agreements during that three-hour meeting, and the workers decided to walk out and not work for the rest of the day.

The majority of the workers felt that they were indispensable to the company, because they had the skills necessary to produce intricate ornaments. They strongly believed

6 Sara Ochoa, interview by author, 20 January 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 5.
that their skills were difficult to attain, since it took months to train people to make dough ornaments at a fast pace and with high quality. For this reason, workers expected that the sit-down and a meeting would convince Mr. Eddy to respond to their concerns.

Several workers hoped that Mr. Eddy would agree to two things: one, that he would restore the higher piece rate structure, and, two, that he would begin again to communicate with them as family as he had in the past. Workers yearned for the old familiar times.7

However, after their sit-down and the three hour meeting which followed, workers realized it would not be that easy. When the sit-down and the meeting did not produce the desired results, workers opted to take a further step in their quest to improve their working conditions. Elena Pulido, who had been working at Calliope Designs since 1975, mentioned to the other workers that her daughter knew of a place where they could obtain legal assistance regarding their working problems. The workers chose a committee to go to California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) to explore what could be done to solve their problems with

7 Elena Pulido, interview by author, 13 January 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 4.
the company owners. They sought help at CRLA where they hoped to find immediate solutions. Even though they did not know clearly what they expected from that agency, they went there because according to them, they saw this as their only recourse.

The workers spoke with Christina Briano of CRLA. According to Briano, CRLA could not provide legal assistance to the workers because the "labor problems they described were not labor violations." Briano decided to refer the workers to the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC), an independent community organization.

The Labor Law Enforcement Center was a community-based organization founded by Newman Strawbridge and Alicia Sanchez in 1987. The formation of the Center in this county was the continuation of community organizing work that Strawbridge and Sanchez had started in Ventura County, California. In Ventura, Strawbridge had developed a questionnaire on minimum working standards to use in his community organizing work.

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8 Pulido, 13 January 1996, p. 4.
9 Christina Briano, interview by author, 7 September 1996, Santa Rosa, California.
10 Briano, 7 September 1996.
In Sonoma County, Strawbridge and Sanchez saw the need to develop a minimum working standards center with a long term goal of organizing a union. As Strawbridge recalled, Sonoma County did not have a center or an organization that would assist workers confronted with violations of labor standards.\(^{11}\) In his attempt to form the Center, Strawbridge contacted local agencies that provided low-cost or free services to workers needing assistance with labor problems. He also approached local unions for support in organizing Latino workers. Strawbridge did not receive the support he expected from agencies and unions. Unions, as Sanchez recalls, lacked the resources to organize Latino workers, in part because they did not have Spanish-speaking organizers.\(^{12}\) In Strawbridge's opinion, Latino workers are the most exploited of the working class in California.\(^{13}\) According to Sanchez, she and Strawbridge could not just go out and say that they wanted to form a union. She explained that they needed to know what type of working violations workers experienced, and in addition, she noted

\(^{11}\) Newman Strawbridge, interview by author, 3 November 1995, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 1.

\(^{12}\) Sanchez, 6 October 1995, p. 2.

\(^{13}\) Strawbridge, 3 November 1995, p. 1.
that they needed to know which workers were the most exploited in terms of ethnic background, and which industries perpetuated these working violations. Sanchez and Strawbridge opted for a bilingual English and Spanish questionnaire on the minimum working standards to determine if there were working violations experienced by the workers.

The questionnaire was distributed by volunteers outside factories in the county, and at shopping malls in working class neighborhoods. Although Sanchez and Strawbridge aimed to organize Latino workers, the questionnaire was distributed to people of all races and backgrounds who were willing to take it.

The questionnaire included questions related to the minimum wage being paid, working hour violations, paid overtime work, differential treatment because of race and gender, and coffee breaks, among other questions. At the end of the questionnaire a telephone number and a Post Office Box in Santa Rosa was printed, giving workers the option of either calling or returning the questionnaire. It was not a controlled data-gathering process,

14 Sanchez, 6 October 1995, p. 2.
15 As well as can be determined, a copy of the questionnaire is not available, and records of incoming telephone calls were not kept.
as Sanchez and Strawbridge did not tally the numbers of respondents in relation to the numbers of questionnaires distributed.\textsuperscript{16}

When workers called responding to the questionnaire, they were able to talk to volunteers who had been trained in labor law by Strawbridge. Members of the Center answered the workers' questions in detail and sought ways to provide assistance beyond a telephone conversation. Sanchez recalls the conversations she held with workers with a spark of happiness in her eyes; helping workers to protect their rights gave her great satisfaction.

We would try to answer correctly as many questions as the person had. We would discuss in length the particular working violations the person encountered at the work site. However, before we completed the interview, we asked the worker if she or he thought of forming a union, it was quite interesting to hear the anti-union sentiment people expressed in our conversations. They would respond immediately 'I do not like unions!' I remember clearly that people who expressed the most anti-union sentiments were predominantly white.\textsuperscript{17}

The completed questionnaires returned by mail and the direct phone consultations with people who called in response to the questionnaire brought a two-level result. The first was the

\textsuperscript{16} Strawbridge, 3 November 1995, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{17} Sanchez, 6 October 1995, p. 4.
immediate services provided to the questionnaire respondents.

But the second level was the most important. According to Strawbridge, the results of the questionnaire confirmed the need to establish a working-class organization with long term goals of forming a labor-community union.18

Calliope Designs workers were unaware of the labor organizing work Strawbridge and Sanchez were doing in Sonoma County. Consequently, when Briano referred them to Strawbridge, she explained that he might provide some assistance in finding solutions to their working problems. The committee chose one of the workers to schedule a meeting with Strawbridge.19

Strawbridge remembers how worried he was about these workers who could have lost their jobs for organizing a sit-down and walking off their jobs. He mentioned that "two workers called, and then I set up a group meeting, and I remember we had to call the meeting off because I was involved in a pesticide investigation. I remember worrying all weekend how these workers were going to respond"20 to the cancellation of the meeting.

18 Strawbridge, 3 November 1995, p. 6
19 Ochoa, 20 January, 1995, p. 8
20 Strawbridge, 3 November 1995, p. 5
At the end of January, 1988, the following week, twenty-one of the twenty-two workers attended the meeting with Strawbridge. The only person who did not attend was a worker on pregnancy leave. Clearly determined to find a solution to their problems, they expected Strawbridge to provide legal advice and to explain to them their rights as workers, so that they could return to work and ask the employer to fulfill those rights. The meeting was an eye opener for them.21 Workers learned that in the absence of a union contract the labor laws in United States allowed Mr. Eddy to cut their wages at his discretion and that he was not required by law to provide benefits to his workers.22 Sanchez also mentioned how obvious it was to her that these workers did not have previous union organizing experience. When she and Strawbridge suggested they could wear a union button to communicate to Mr. Eddy that they wanted to form a union, none of

21 Sanchez, 6 October 1995, p. 6.
22 According Herring, pursuant to United States Labor Code, employers have the right to cut wages arbitrarily, but not below minimum wage. In addition, Herring continued, employers are not required by any labor law to provide health benefits. Herring has been a Labor Law attorney for over twenty-five years.
them knew what a union button was. "Workers thought it was a
regular clothing button, and they could not understand why we
wanted them to wear a botón (button)."23

The workers came to understand that Mr. Eddy was not going
to give them fair treatment, benefits and an increase in wages
without a struggle. After talking to Sanchez and Strawbridge,
workers concluded that their only alternative was to form a union.

This first meeting with Strawbridge and Sanchez brought a
radical change in the workers' situation. First, they educated
themselves about the realities of labor laws in the United States.
Second, they were able to empower themselves as a group of
workers united to protect their rights. For many of these workers,
this was their first exposure to a structured meeting. Sanchez
recalls this first meeting with tears in her eyes:

We talked about what a union meant: All of them
coming together, being able to decide that they were going
to change their lives by coming together. [It] was
interesting that one of the women asked: "What does it
take for us to form a union?" And Newman said: 'All you
have to do is make a motion.' I translated to the woman:
'Lo que tienes que hacer es decir que quieren la union.' She
sat there for a few minutes without saying anything.
[Then] she lifted her arm in a fist and said: 'Me siguen? -
would you follow me?' Everybody started saying 'si, si, si

23 Sanchez, 6 October 1995, p. 6.
-yes, yes, yes.' She felt she had to do a sort of physical movement. So that is when she raised her fist, thinking that is what I meant to say: 'I move to do this or that.'

This meeting marked a watershed in the history of Mexicans living in Sonoma County. This group of Mexicans working in the manufacturing industry decided to change their lives by coming together as a group, and forming the first Mexican industrial union in this county, the Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU). These twenty-two decided that they did not want to join another union, but to form their own.

In the process of forming their own union, these workers developed an organization with a strong grassroots element. They made their first hand-made buttons that read: "We want a union/Queremos un Sindicato." Buttons were made from paper, cut in a circle and glued to a piece of metal or board. Two days after the January meeting, the workers pinned on their buttons and walked proudly as a group into their workplace.

Wearing the union buttons was the method workers chose to notify Mr. Eddy that they wanted to have an election for collective

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24 Sanchez, 6 October 1995, p. 7.
bargaining representation. In doing so, they were protected by the National Labor Relations Act, and Mr. Eddy could not fire them for their decision to form a union. Sanchez recalls that she and Strawbridge took turns waiting outside the plant in the parking lot. They were afraid that Mr. Eddy would take some action against the workers. During the lunch break, Sanchez said, workers reported to them that Mr. Eddy was "shocked and asked them why they were wearing those buttons. The workers answered him, 'because we want a union.'"^{27}

Several of the workers spoke of the subsequent radical change in Mr. Eddy's behavior. Mrs. Pulido recalls that:

From that time on, he never talked to us again. He was mad. He said many things, but I do not know what he said, because I do not speak English. As I said, people were not asking for a lot--just a little. If he would have agreed, we all would have been happy with each other...[The supervisor] also stopped talking to us. It was not the same--the environment was very tense.\textsuperscript{28}

Strawbridge filed a petition signed by the twenty-two workers with the NLRB the following day. He requested that the NLRB inform Mr. Eddy of the action, and also petition for an election for collective bargaining representation.

\textsuperscript{27} Sanchez, 6 October 1995, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{28} Pulido, 13 January 1996, p. 5.
During the two months it took for the NLRB to schedule the election, the working relations grew increasingly tense. Although Mr. Eddy did not directly discourage the workers from organizing a union, he no longer spoke to the workers. Additionally, the supervisor and Mr. Eddy began to dictate arbitrarily who was going to make the ornaments that were on the top of the pay scale. The company produced a wide range of ornaments that varied from a simple heart to a detailed wedding couple. The less detailed ornaments were popular with the workers, because they could be produced more rapidly, thus resulting in greater compensation for the worker. The few workers that did not participate in the union organizing efforts were given these ornaments to produce, and the most vocal union supporters were compelled to make new ornament patterns and more complicated ornaments that resulted in lower compensation. Ochoa stated that before they organized the union, Farias, the masa-making person, would have their masa available immediately upon the worker's request. After the campaign for the union started, according to Ochoa, Farias did not fill the masa orders at the requested time. Instead, she would

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Paulina Martínez, interview by author, 27 April 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 1.
take a long time to fill the orders. These actions caused the workers to lose money as they waited for the *masa*.\(^{30}\)

Mr. Eddy organized two lunches for the workers during the campaign for the election. He planned these lunches to coincide with the weekly lunchtime potlucks workers were holding on Fridays outside the factory. Many of the workers felt conflicted about this. On one hand, they wanted to win the election, but on the other hand, they continued having "family-like" feelings for Mr. Eddy, and they did not want to hurt his feelings by not attending his lunches. Because of these feelings, the workers decided to participate in Mr. Eddy's lunches, but they did not change their mind about the union organizing. Mr. Eddy also sent letters to workers expressing his unhappiness regarding their union organizing. Mr. Eddy mentioned how shocked he and Mrs Eddy were by the workers' union activities because they had been like a family, attending their parties, baptisms, and weddings. Now, workers were choosing to move apart from them, breaking the family bonds they had built for years.\(^{31}\)

\(^{31}\) Martinez, 27 April 1996, p. 6.
Mr. Eddy's behavior was not as extreme as is often found with employers. In Sanchez' opinion, some employers make the working conditions so unbearable for workers that they resign before the election for collective bargaining. Nonetheless, the interviews of the workers clearly demonstrate that they experienced a high level of tension in the workplace.

Despite Mr. Eddy's efforts to discourage workers from voting for the union, they continued organizing their election campaign. During the campaign, workers experienced radical changes, not only in their personal lives, but also in their political awareness. Many workers learned how to use a typewriter, do bulk mailings, and keep office records. Some learned to run meetings, make organizing telephone calls, and speak in public. Additionally, workers were studying English and learning union organizing strategies.

Workers organized themselves into several committees with one or two workers chairing each. Sara Ochoa, Mario Jimenez, Paulina Martinez, and Adolfina Hernandez emerged as leaders in organizing the committees.

Alicia Sanchez, interview by author, 11 October 1995, tape recording, Sebastopol, California, transcription, p. 2.
One committee organized home visits to workers who were not supporting the union. These latter workers included a few American Indian and Anglo women, and they were not part of the twenty-two original workers seeking union representation. Community members went with the workers to interpret, at the same time often providing organizing tips to assist committee members in encouraging people to join the union. Paul Kaplan, President of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in Sonoma County, remembers the home visits:

I remember visiting workers at their home and talking to them about voting for the union...I went to one woman's house [Lupe Farias] with Newman, and she was the person [who prepared the dough for the workers] and kind of ambivalent. I think that she ended up voting against the union. It was not only Brown workers who worked at the plant; there were White workers there, too, who worked in different aspects. And, I think that the vote came down along racial lines, and the way that the union was won is that the majority of the people who worked there were Latino workers. So that is why the union was successful. In terms of bridging the gap, the employers were very successful in using people's racial identity to divide them up.33

One committee was responsible for inviting community members to attend the workers' weekly noontime potluck rallies held outside Calliope Designs. Sanchez explained the system she

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33 Paul Kaplan, interview by author, 16 October 1995, tape recording, Dillon Beach, California, transcription, p. 4.
and the workers developed to include community people, organizations and other unions in their community-worker rallies.

I gave certain workers who knew English a list of telephone numbers and names of community people, and I gave them a script. I would write a little script for them: something like this: 'Hi, I am Fina, and I am a Calliope Designs worker. I am calling you to invite you to a lunch on Friday from 12:00 p.m. to 12:30 p.m.' The workers themselves would make the phone calls to talk to the community people.34

The NLRB held the Calliope Designs' election for collective bargaining on March 25, 1988, with a resounding victory for the workers. Twenty-two workers voted in favor of the union, and three against. Since the Eddys did not challenge the election, the NLRB certified Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU) as the bargaining unit for the workers at Calliope Designs.

However, the contract negotiations which followed encountered several serious obstacles. Mr. Eddy presented contract proposals that were no different than the current wage and working conditions. Mr. Eddy also hired an attorney, Michael Merrill, who was experienced in labor law. According to Sanchez, Mr. Eddy became extremely obstinate during negotiations. His perception of "family-like" relations impeded him from relating to

his employees as workers. According to Sanchez, Eddy's personal feelings blocked him from negotiating in good faith on a business level.\textsuperscript{35} Negotiations became adversarial immediately, and they deteriorated in terms of the ability to negotiate in good faith.\textsuperscript{36}

Kaplan's experience in collective bargaining was reflected in his opinion of the negotiation process. According to Kaplan,

\begin{quote}
The employer did not want to give anything [new] in the contract that he already was not giving in independent terms of agreement, [so] there was not the willingness on the employer's part [to negotiate in good faith]. [I saw] a variety of things at play. The inexperience on our part, [in collective bargaining] for one, and the newness in organizing industrial Latino workers in Sonoma County. [In addition], the complexity [of the contract] in terms of piece-rate structure, how the work was organized, and how to codify that and put it all in writing.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

Bargaining at the table presented a new challenge not previously experienced by the union organizers and the workers. Strawbridge and Sanchez had extensive peace and labor movement organizing experience, but they did not have specific expertise in contract negotiations. The worker representatives also had no previous experience and looked to Sanchez and Strawbridge for guidance and expertise.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Sanchez, 11 October 1995, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Kaplan, 16 October 1995, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Kaplan, 16 October 1995, p. 6.
\end{itemize}
An additional challenge was that Strawbridge and Sanchez had many other commitments during this period. In addition to the Calliope negotiations, they also became involved with the workers at Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF) who were in the process of organizing their union election campaign for collective bargaining. \(^{38}\) Sanchez was working full time for California Human Development Corporation (CHDC), and Strawbridge was working as an independent investigator for private attorneys. It is probable that the many demands on their time affected their ability to negotiate a contract for Calliope Designs workers.

Kaplan felt that Strawbridge and Sanchez also allowed their personal feelings to affect the contract negotiations. Intimately involved in the day-to-day workers' organizing efforts, they lacked the emotional detachment necessary to negotiate objectively and successfully. \(^{39}\) Usually, union organizers do not represent the workers at the bargaining table. Union lawyers or other union members execute that difficult task.

\(^{38}\) PSGF union organizing efforts will be cover in Part 2.

\(^{39}\) Kaplan, 16 October 1995, p. 6.
In Herring's opinion, contract negotiations were problematic:

One of the things that was a weakness in SCIU leadership was that they did not take organized coherent steps in collective bargaining. In other words, they did not put out a coherent union package proposal. Alicia and Newman were not well prepared for the negotiation sessions at all. I would try to get Alicia and Newman to meet to decide on tactics at the bargaining table.

But those tactics, to the extent we ever agreed on any ahead of time, were rarely implemented. Alicia would go off on a tangent at the bargaining table, or the company would do something provocative--maybe the company lawyer would say something insulting...In collective bargaining you are trying to figure out what is really important for your people and what is really important to "the enemy," to the company.40

The absence of professionalism at the negotiating table affected the workers severely. The empowerment they had gained during the two previous months of organizing appeared to dissipate as workers felt less and less power in negotiations. The workers' representatives on the negotiating committee did not take an active role in the negotiations. They did not fully understand the process of writing a contract and negotiating it at the table with the employer. A few of them indicated that they had not understood the process clearly because they had not had enough preparation before the negotiating meetings. The meetings were not fully interpreted for them. This problem could have been

40 Herring, 24 October 1995, pp. 9-10.
avoided by contracting with a professional interpreter, thus allowing the workers to have a complete and coherent understanding of the negotiations. Obviously, contracting with a professional interpreter would have been the responsibility of the union organizers. However, Sanchez and Strawbridge did not consider it a priority because Sanchez is bilingual. She could briefly summarize the discussions for the workers present at the negotiating table.

Ochoa was part of the negotiating committee, and she mentioned her dissatisfaction with the format of the contract negotiations. She also mentioned that Mr. Eddy did not talk directly to the workers during the negotiating meetings. Even if one of the workers gathered his or her courage to ask him a direct question, Mr. Eddy would always look at Strawbridge and Sanchez when he spoke, and never made eye contact with the workers. Sanchez and Strawbridge could have empowered the workers by asking Mr. Eddy to answer the worker's question by looking and talking directly to the worker. Ochoa discussed how lost she felt when the meeting was partially summarized in Spanish by Sanchez.41

During the interviewing process, two of the workers were reminded of the contract negotiations, and after some time to recollect, they discussed their discontent with the process. They had hoped for an agreement that would benefit everybody—workers and employer. However, after three months of frustrating negotiations, workers considered the idea of going on strike. Workers felt frustrated because they could not reach an agreement with Mr. Eddy regarding piece rate wages, paid vacation, sick leave, health insurance, and union security. As mentioned previously, workers felt indispensable to the company and believed that a strike would last only a few days and would achieve the desired results.

In a meeting at the beginning of July 1988, the Calliope Designs workers voted to go on strike. The vote was twenty-one in favor, with no workers voting against or even speaking against a strike. They had made a decision and now they would live with it.

Because the union was new, workers did not yet have a strike fund. Workers did not take this into account, perhaps because they
expected to be back to work within a few days. None of them had ever been part of a strike, and they did not know what a strike entailed.

In retrospect, workers seemed to regret the decision they had made to go on strike. A few stated that they were told but not fully informed about the problems they might face. According to Sanchez, she and Strawbridge fully informed workers about the consequences of a strike. Furthermore, she stated that she and Strawbridge tried to convinced the workers to seek other alternatives to a strike.42

However, Martha Jimenez stated that Sanchez and Strawbridge did not provide the proper information about a strike and its consequences:

In reality they [Strawbridge and Sanchez] never told us. Well, I think that not even they had a notion. I am very sure that they did not have a notion, or experience, about union organizing. They did not have a clue of what they were doing. In other words, they just told us: 'Organize yourselves, and it is going to be very easy...' "A piece of cake." That is why the night we voted to go on strike Newman and Alicia thought that everything was going to be solved overnight, and the companeros (fellow workers) were thinking in similar ways.43

42 Sanchez, 11 October 1995, pp. 2-3.
43 Martha Jimenez, interview by author, 13 December 1995, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 9.
Workers discussed openly how naive they were when they voted to go on strike. During the interviews, several of the workers spoke of two major mistakes: that they should not have gone on strike, and that if they were going to strike, they should have chosen to go out during the high-production months. Ochoa felt that both workers and union organizers were responsible for going on strike at that time:

Alicia and Newman said that we could boycott the stores where the patron sold his merchandise. We were not able to do anything like that. Another thing is that we did not have support from the state, and I do not remember us discussing it. The support I am talking about is that the strike needed to be respected. There was no law to stop the patron from hiring other people to replace us. Truthfully speaking, we did not think seriously about all those things before going on strike. The strike was presented to us as a "piece of cake." I assumed they [Sanchez and Strawbridge] had experience in those matters. They had to explain all those issues more in detail. But, as I told you, one of the reasons was because I personally had never been in a union, much less participated in a strike. And I think it was similar for the majority of my companeros. We thought that we were going to control the situation very fast. They may have seen us very enthusiastic, but they should have said that was not the right time to go on strike.45

44 Ochoa is referring to a Mexican Labor Law that closes the factory during the time workers are on strike. This practice is not common in the United States.
Sanchez stated that she and Strawbridge discussed at length the strike with the workers.

I do not think the workers [truly understood the implications of a strike]. Nobody actually knows what a strike is like and whether you can sustain it. I mean, if you are a worker, if you never had gone out on strike, you have no idea what it entails, and these workers themselves did not know. Newman and I were really worried because we kept thinking that a strike can create disunity, divide us, and make us break up as a union. We were shocked at the unity and solidarity, the love that these twenty-one workers had for each other.46

On July 13, 1988, workers at Calliope Designs went out on strike, alleging that Mr Eddy had not been negotiating in good faith and had canceled a negotiation session the night before. As SCIU was a new and independent union, the workers were without a strike fund. Workers and union organizers mobilized a strike campaign to seek monetary and moral support from other unions, peace organizations and the community. Workers also organized a media committee to keep the press informed about the strike.

The Press Democrat played an active role by keeping the community informed of the union organizing efforts of the Mexican workers of Sonoma County Industrial Union. On Thursday, July 14, 1988, The Press Democrat reported that twenty workers were

46 Sanchez, 11 October 1996, p. 3.
picketing outside Calliope Designs on Wednesday morning. Mrs. Eddy expressed surprise by the strike because "no one [had] said anything to us about a strike or a reason to strike." However, workers stated that Mr. Eddy's refusal to bargain in good faith and treat Mexican workers with respect prompted the strike. Holanda Arzate, a worker, told the newsman that "they just don't take us seriously. They think that what we want will never be accomplished and what they'd like to do is break the union."47

Workers told The Press Democrat that wages were very low, that a person working there for six years was earning less than $6.00 an hour, and that they were underpaid and mistreated because they were Mexicans. Conversely, Mr. Eddy stated that workers earned between $6.00 and $12.00 an hour, depending on the kind of wage-piece rate or hourly rate--and that workers earned the same regardless of their ethnic background.48

Neil Herring spoke of his concerns regarding the workers' decision to strike:

During the first few days of the strike, workers believed that the strike would not be long. They had not an inflated idea, but a strong idea of [their] indispensability at Calliope Designs, and this is always a dangerous misconception.\textsuperscript{49}

Workers and union organizers did not consider several key factors. Lupe Farias, the person who prepared the dough for the ornaments, did not go on strike. This was particularly damaging to the strikers' effort, because Farias was the only worker who knew how to prepare the dough. Because Farias did not go on strike, Mr. Eddy did not have to halt operations to train a new person. Farias also recruited a few Mexicans to work during the strike. The recruitment of Mexicans as replacement workers was difficult for several of the striking workers to accept. They expected their countrymen to support them in their struggle, and they felt betrayed by their own. After all, the strikers reasoned, they were all in this struggle to improve the treatment of Mexicans in the workplace.\textsuperscript{50}

It became clear to the workers that Mr. Eddy had no intention of speeding up the negotiations. Mr. Eddy hired two security guards to keep workers off the premises.

\textsuperscript{49} Herring, 24 October 1995, p. 11.
Additionally, Mr. Eddy had made preparations for the possibility of a strike or another work stoppage. Prior to the strike, he had rehired a few workers who had left the company and who were not necessarily in favor of the union. After the strike started, Mr. Eddy moved quickly to hire replacement workers, primarily of Asian descent. This action was a definite setback for the strikers. The Mexican workers on strike felt that the Asian strike breakers were damaging to the strike. The Asian workers did not speak fluent enough English to communicate with union members and supporters about what the Mexican workers were fighting for. According to Kaplan, the practice of hiring people of different ethnic background as strike breakers has been commonly used by employers who are not interested in negotiating in good faith.51

In The Press Democrat, July 27, 1988, picketing workers said the company was "wasting their money on replacement workers

who are too inexperienced to make dough ornaments requiring much patience and skill. Workers...said the company brought in seven workers...to help replace the twenty employees...on strike."\(^{52}\)

Facing these new challenges, workers resorted to a fast and wide mobilization to gain support for their struggle. With the aid of other unions and the Anglo and Mexican communities, workers organized different committees to plan and implement their strike strategies. One committee worked on a campaign to collect funds to support the strikers. The members of this committee went to several churches, including Community Baptist Church, Resurrection Catholic Church, and the Unitarian Fellowship, among others. Workers sent delegates to talk to different unions, such as the Letter Carriers, Carpenters, and Service Employees International Union. They also participated in community events, so that they could inform people about the strike and solicit donations for their economic survival. Money and food were

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\(^{52}\) Alvaro Delgado, "Workers Vow to Continue The Strike: Companies Are Recruiting Replacements," Staff Writer, The Press Democrat, Santa Rosa, CA. 27 July 1988, Sec. B, p. 3 1:2
collected and distributed equitably among workers. Couples who both worked at Calliope Designs received a greater share because they did not have any other source of income.

Another committee solicited support for the picket line. Workers needed help during the picketing because they were covering two entrances, and because as the strike continued, many workers took temporary jobs in other places. Some of the senior workers, among them Pulido, Ochoa and Martinez, felt angry at workers who actively sought other jobs because that left only a few of them covering the picket line most of the time. According to these three women, the workers who abandoned the picket line were the very people who had pushed the idea of a strike. Therefore, those remaining were forced to solicit community people to staff the picket line and talk to the strike breakers, press, and other union supporters who were interested in their struggle.

The "Friday Lunches" committee continued operating as before the strike. The committee brought dozens of people to rally
outside Calliope Designs every Friday at noon where food or money was distributed to workers. During these "Friday Lunches," supporters were given an update on the negotiations.

Workers vividly described the hardships they endured during the strike. All of them remembered that the strike brought financial difficulties and family problems and also posed risks to future employment.

Pulido described her dissatisfaction with some of her coworkers and the strikebreakers. According to Pulido, workers who took other jobs were not united with the workers who fully participated in the strike for the three months that it lasted.

I had to go to the picket line at certain hours because that was my shift. And some other compañeras [coworkers] asked me to cover their shifts in addition to mine, because they said they had to do errands. They were all mentiras [lies]. They did not have any errands to do. They went to work, and that was not okay. I did not know anything about a strike before. All of the sudden, since you do not know anything, you get involved. And, when you want to leave, you want to get out, you cannot: it is like everything. We all suffered. We did not know. We were blind. We did not know what to do. I [also] felt very upset at the scabs because they knew that we were outside for them, too. Because, in the future we could all benefit. And yet, they always worked...I did not feel okay for them to work because that was my job; they were taking it away from me.53

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Adolfina Hernandez worked in the shipping department, and she remembers the difficulties she experienced during the strike. The strike was the catalyst for radical changes in her life, leading to a divorce and a severe workplace injury. On the positive side, she felt empowered by the unity of Mexicans and Anglos working together for a common goal.

We had an idea of what to expect because Newman and Alicia told us about the strike. But it is never the same to be told as to experience it, because to live a strike experience was very difficult. The first and most important aspect, at least for me, was the division among Mexican workers, our own Raza [Race]...I felt horrible to see Mexicans going in to work for the patron while we were on strike. The second aspect was the fact that we had to be on the picket line every day...To support ourselves we did many things. We even made cheese to sell among friends. I even went to the flea market in Napa with cans to ask people for donations. That means we were boteando. We also went to different businesses, like Food 4 Less and Lucky stores.

We felt bad to see the scabs going in to work...I was very angry because we were struggling to improve the working conditions, and it was awful to see Latinas working there.

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54 Boteando is a practice commonly used in Mexico by workers on strike. Strikes are respected in Mexico. The factory closes down, and no strike breakers are allowed to work. Workers on strike form small groups of two or three, and go to popular places to inform people about their strike and to request donations to support the strike. People place their donations in sealed cans that are then taken to the union hall to be added to the general fund.

Martinez described the events of the union organizing in tears. For her the strike was a time of hardship and pain. Martinez was detained during the strike because, according to Mr. Eddy, she had physically assaulted the woman security guard with her picket sign. Martinez was taken into custody by the police. Workers, union organizers and community members paid for her bail, and she was released a few hours later. Although she was seen as a heroine in the struggle, she did not see herself as one. On the contrary, Martinez felt devastated. Her life had been marked by the police arrest. Her cultural values had taught her that a woman never sets foot in prison, and she had gone against her own values and her husband's.

Economically we did a little bad. I do not complain a lot because my husband was working at that time and that helped me...Morale-wise, [the strike] was bad in terms of what happened to me...I never had an experience like that. In terms of the incident with the security guard...I was detained and taken over there [Jail].

Even though I was taken to jail, I was on the picket-line the next day, with more conviction and anger. So, I was there all day. That same day he [Mr. Eddy] came out and saw me...He threw all my things in a box into the street [and fired me]...I remember clearly that this incident happened on August 12, 1988. I went back to the picket line on August 13, 1988.

The union sued Calliope Designs for firing me during the
strike, and months later, after people went back to work, the NLRB told the patron that he did not have the right to fire me.\textsuperscript{56}

Herring explained the tactics used by the company to fire Martinez, and how the strike was turned into an unfair labor practice strike.

The firing of Paulina Martinez was simply a company tactic. You cannot fire strikers. You can fire a striker who engages in strike misconduct—that means violence or intimidation, or interfering with the scabs going to work, that kind of thing. But you cannot fire the strikers. If you do not fire them, they have the right to go back to work when the strike is over...There are two kinds of strikes under the United States law. One is what is called the unfair labor practice strike. So an unfair labor practice strike is one that is caused or aggravated by the company committing an unfair labor practice, which is defined in the NLRB Act. And, the usual unfair labor practice committed during the strike would be not bargaining in good faith, or firing strikers unlawfully. So, if the union has been able to say...[that this is what it is], and I think we actually did this, [then we are able] to convert the strike into an unfair labor practice strike after Paulina was fired. Why? Because the key difference is that if you are in an unfair labor practice strike, you cannot be permanently replaced. When you say 'I am ready to go back to work', you must be given your job back. If you are a non-unfair labor practice striker, which the law calls an economic striker, then you can be permanently replaced. So, if the company claims it has replaced you with a scab, if you are on an economic strike, and you say: 'Okay, the strike is over, I am reporting for work', they can say: 'You do not have a job any more.'\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56} Martinez, 27 April 1996, pp. 6-10.
\textsuperscript{57} Herring, 24 October 1995, pp. 12-14.
Workers stayed on strike for two more months without any progress in negotiations with Mr. Eddy. Although workers received considerable support from the community, peace groups, and other unions, they were growing increasingly desperate for money.

At the beginning of October 1988, workers received the final contract offer from Calliope Designs. They were told that if they did not return to work by October 13, 1988, the twenty striking workers would be permanently replaced.

On October 14, 1988, The Press Democrat did an extensive report on Calliope Designs' final contract proposal to the workers.

Union representatives maintain the company's last offer reduced piece rates for the most popular crafts. But Mike Merrill, attorney for Calliope Designs said the workers will work under the pay and benefit provisions of the last offer, even though the union refused to accept the proposal. He said seven of the twenty replacement workers [hired] on a temporary basis by Calliope Designs will be retained to handle the company's growing work load. Neil Herring, attorney for SCIU, said workers realized the replacement workers would carry Calliope Designs through the Christmas business crunch. Herring said the Calliope Designs package offered no union security, recognition of seniority, or health insurance for dependents.58

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Herring observed during his interview that workers felt a strong sense of support for each other inside the plant.

I think their morale was pretty high [when they returned to work]. I think they felt proud that they had survived for three months without wages, and involved the community in their support. They were not intimidated, they did not go back with their heads down. They had developed good leadership, they were good strong people. They also functioned effectively as job stewards. So when anything happened, they would stop work, go with the employee into the office of the boss and confront the boss. Usually not just one worker, but two or three.\footnote{Herring, 24 October 1995, p. 14.}

Although workers felt pride that they had sustained a three-month long struggle, they also experienced feelings of defeat because they had not accomplished all of their goals with the strike. It was difficult returning to work without a signed union contract after their difficult struggle. They gained only minimal improvements in benefits and did not gain any substantial wage raise, which was one of the main reasons they went on strike.

Ochoa described with sadness in her face the first day she went back to work after the strike.

The first day of work was terrible for me. I even got sick. My stomach hurt all day because the atmosphere was horrible. The scabs, supervisors, and workers who did not participate in the strike gave us dirty looks. Nobody talked to us...In reality when I went back to work, I was very proud.
because I went back to work. I did not take anybody's work away...I remember that they [scabs] left one side of the shop for us. I did not care about that. On the contrary, I felt fine [not being with them].

Pulido felt that the strike forced Mr. Eddy to close the company and move it to Tijuana, Mexico. Pulido also discussed the lack of trust she felt for two fellow workers after they returned to work. For her, the most difficult issue to accept during the strike and afterwards was feeling deserted by her fellow Mexican workers. She could not find an explanation for their behavior. After all, according to Pulido, they were all "brothers and sisters united in the same cause."

We did not win anything with the strike. The only thing that we won was the moody faces we saw every day. We may have won something but not better pay. However, the patrones did not reduce our wages anymore...It is true that we won our jobs back when the strike was over, and we had to leave after a few years because the work ended. We left because the patron moved the shop to Tijuana. Alicia [Sanchez] used to say that they may move the shop a few miles. But look how far they moved! So what did we win?

Hernandez had a difficult time returning to work after the strike. Shortly after she returned, a severe accident at work left

Hernandez disabled. She never returned to work at Calliope Designs following the accident. During her interview, she spoke of the strike and the accident.

On one side, we were happy because we won. We defeated the patron, and we had shown to him that we were not as stupid as he thought...When I went back to work, I had an accident three days later. The supervisor and I were supplying orders. I needed one box from the higher shelves. Well, he just pulled the box in the middle and the box that was on top fell on my head. I had no room to move to. There was only space for the ladder and myself. The box weighed 40 pounds. So when it landed on me, I fell with my legs wide open...I was taken to the hospital, and he was removed from his job immediately...I had to go to court to fight for my case. After a long struggle, I received $10,000.00 as a compensation for my accident.63

After Hernandez' accident, Mr. Eddy laid off four of the most active workers for a month because he said that they did not follow the company's disciplinary rules. The union could not do anything to help the workers return to their jobs.64 These events marked the beginning of the demise of the union inside the plant and among its general membership.

In August of 1993 when Calliope Designs moved to Tijuana, only seven of the twenty-two workers who had organized still worked for Calliope Designs, and only two remained formally

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63 Hernandez, 5 December 1995, pp. 5-7.
64 Pulido, 13 January 1996, p. 12.
active in the union. Jimenez described the surprise she received when she reported to work on a Monday in August of 1993 and was told that Calliope Designs was closing.

They did not tell us about closing. We just got to work on a Monday, and they gave us a recommendation letter and our checks...We had an idea that they were going to close the factory...but they did not tell us when they were going to close.65

Pulido felt that all the years she worked for Calliope Designs were in vain, because she did not receive any severance compensation when Calliope Designs closed.

One day when we arrived at work, there was no masa. So, we wondered: 'How are we going to work?' Lupe was just laughing. When the patron arrived he told us: 'This is it.' He told us to pick up our belongings, making sure that we did not take anything that did not belong to us. We had our own equipment for working. We either had bought it there or someplace else. So, we picked up our stuff and left...After all the work I did for the union and the patron, I did not receive any kind of compensation for the eighteen years that I worked for Calliope Designs. Nothing. They said that they did not have the means, and the union could not do anything because it had been gone for one year. In reality, the union had not been active since the end of 1990.66

2. Point St. George Fisheries.

The union organizing efforts of the workers at Calliope Designs provided an example to other Latino workers in Sonoma County. In February 1988, during the Calliope Designs workers' campaign for representation, workers at Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF) approached Sanchez and Strawbridge to help them organize a campaign for union representation at their worksite.

PSGF processed fish and shellfish for a broad restaurant and grocery store market in Northern California and in some parts of Oregon. This company, owned by Americans of Portuguese descent, had originated in Sonoma County and expanded its business to San Francisco and to Oregon in the 1970's. Its Santa Rosa plant, which was the main one, was located on Sebastopol Road and employed over 170 Mexican and a few Central American workers. The supervisory positions were held by Anglos and Portuguese.

According to Sanchez, the workers at the San Francisco and Oregon plants were unionized, and the workers at the Santa Rosa plant lacked union representation. Sanchez explains that the vast majority of workers in the Santa Rosa plant were Mexicans, and she views the absence of union representation as a racial problem
because the employer did not want to pay the Mexican workers wages that were comparable to those paid in his two other plants.

All the plants [in San Francisco and Oregon] were unionized under the Food and Commercial Workers Union, except for this one [Santa Rosa]. One of the things that was interesting was that the majority of the workers in the Oregon and San Francisco plants were predominately white. And at this plant, which was the main one here in Santa Rosa for processing, or the largest I should say, the workers were predominately Mexican. That was, [perhaps] one of the reasons that the company in many ways was racist. They did not want to allow Mexican workers to unionize because they did not want to pay them the same wages.¹

The large majority of the workers earned an hourly wage and rotated through jobs according to the fish season. They cracked and cleaned crabs, peeled shrimp, or packed and stored fish in the freezers. Only a small group of women worked filleting fish. The twenty *fileteras* earned a piece rate wage. They were the best paid workers in the plant and enjoyed higher status than the rest of the workers. Only the most qualified women became *fileteras*, and trained for approximately one year before they were put on the filleting fish line. The *fileteras* worked at the conveyor belt that carried the fish. A male worker threw the fish at the beginning of

the conveyor belt, and the fileteras took the fish from the belt to fillet it. The senior fileteras were at the beginning of the belt, so they had the choice of the best fish to fillet. As those were the larger fish, they were able to fillet more pounds, thereby earning more money at piece rate wages. The less senior fileteras filleted the fish the senior fileteras left on the band. Often that fish was small and took longer to fillet. They had to work fast because the male worker was constantly putting fish on the belt.²

According to the workers, working conditions at PSGF were very poor. Workers did not receive health benefits, vacation or sick days. A large majority of them earned the minimum wage and worked under unsafe and unhealthy circumstances. Because this was a fish-processing plant, the law required that workers wear protective gear--rubber boots, plastic or cloth gloves, hair caps, and plastic or cloth aprons--provided by the employer. PSGF had been violating these laws for years by charging the workers for protective gear and by permitting many employees to work without the proper gear.³ Many workers who could not afford to buy the

² Celia Mendoza, interview by author, 16 September 1996, Santa Rosa, California,
³ Neil Herring, interview by author, 24 October 1995, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 8.
necessary protective gear were allowed by their supervisors to work in their regular clothing and street shoes.⁴

These and other workplace violations caused many accidents.⁵ During the interviews, workers unanimously expressed concerns about the safety and hygiene of the plant. Workers related that they had sought workers' compensation when they had been involved in accidents at work. Gomez states that prior to the union organizing in 1988, the violations and unsafe working conditions were never reported to the CAL-OSHA or to the city of Santa Rosa.⁶

Julieta Martin Del Campo confirmed that the charges of unsafe working conditions and the company's failure to provide protective gear were accurate. According to her, the plant was dirty. There was not good sanitation or safe working conditions. The company did not have good floor mats to protect us from falling down. Instead, they spread salt on the floors. The company did not provide protective gear, and many people did not have the means to buy boots, aprons,

⁴ Julieta Martin del Campo, interview by author, 16 March 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription. p. 4.
⁵ Agueda Gomez, interview by author, 24 February 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcript, p. 4.
⁶ Gomez, 1 November 1995, p. 4.
gloves, and hair nets. Many people were often allowed to work in regular shoes. There were not strict rules in terms of protective gear.\textsuperscript{7}

Agueda Gomez explained that workers had accidents constantly and that the company would fire people who reported any accidents to workers' compensation authorities.

[In terms of accidents], if we cut ourselves at work, and we did not work for a few days, they did not cover any wages or expenses. Unless a person cut herself very, very bad. Then she was taken to the hospital. If the cut was not too bad, she went to the office and they put a bandaid and a plastic protector on the finger, and she was sent back to work...There were people there [PSGF] who got cut, or fell down and hurt themselves very badly. And they [owners] got very upset because the workers complained to workers' compensation, and they [owners] denied it. They said that nothing happened there, that nobody hurt himself there. So the burden of proof lay on the worker...If workers made a report to Workers' Compensation, they had to leave [the company] permanently because the [patrones] did not take them back. That is why workers seldom reported their accidents.\textsuperscript{8}

In addition to the unsafe working conditions, workers also experienced physical and verbal abuse at the plant. Workers described how a "woman supervisor hit several workers with a

\textsuperscript{7} Del Campo, 16 March 1996, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{8} Gomez, 1 November 1995, p. 4.
knife sharpener and another supervisor cursed and insulted workers in both English and Spanish.·

These allegedly terrible working conditions prompted workers to sign union cards passed among the workers by some of the fileteras. Even though fileteras were the best paid workers at PSGF, they initiated the union organizing. The plant manager, Les Amundsen, had begun a night filetera shift at the end of 1987. By March 1988, the night shift was doing most of the filleting production. Therefore, fileteras from the day shift were losing working hours, despite the fact that they were the senior fileteras. Before the fileteras approached SCIU for assistance, Celia Mendoza, the senior filetera, attempted to convince Amundsen to close the filetera night shift. However, Amundsen refused to close it, arguing that he needed the night shift to supply restaurants in the early morning.10

Several workers indicated during the interviews that the supervisors had a tendency to swear to workers. Mostly to female workers.

10 Celia Mendoza, interview by author, 24 February 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, pp 1-3.
Mendoza emigrated from Michoacan, Mexico when she was in her early twenties, and she started working at PSGF in June 1968. Mendoza worked peeling shrimp and cleaning crab for ten years. In 1978, she was promoted to a *filetera* position. Although she was happy to be promoted after ten years of peeling shrimp, she was also apprehensive because she was the first Mexican to hold a *filetera* position. Mendoza described the discriminatory treatment she received from the other *fileteras* who were second generation Italians. According to Mendoza, Italians did not like to have a Mexican working side by side with them. Italian and Portuguese workers had become accustomed to seeing the few Mexicans there doing the hardest and worst paid jobs. Clearly, Italian and Portuguese workers dominated the unskilled labor force at PSGF throughout the 1950s. However, as the Italian and Portuguese workers began to retire during the 1960's, Mexicans dominated the labor force at PSGF. In 1968, when Mendoza started working at PSGF, the discrimination against Mexicans was already terrible. Mexicans, she stated, were called "wetbacks" and "people without
papers* [undocumented] by everyone. Italian, American Indian, and Portuguese workers were always screaming that they were going to call immigration on the Mexicans.\textsuperscript{11}

Describing the harsh conditions Mexicans worked under at PSGF in Santa Rosa during the 1960's and the 1970's, Mendoza recalled that "Mexicans always had the worst jobs. Mexican men had to pack frozen fish all day long, and Mexican women helped the men pack the frozen fish, all for minimum wage!"\textsuperscript{12} During the 1980's, she said, working conditions worsened.

We started organizing a union because at that time, the working conditions went from bad to worse, and they were not giving us work. They [the owners] made a filetera night shift, and I told them not to make the night shift because there was not enough work for everyone [meaning fileteras]. I defended myself, because I have always defended myself, right? Then Les Amundsen, the general manager, told me; 'Do not worry, Celia, there will be enough work for everyone.' But, it was not true. Soon enough, he was giving more work to the night shift than to us, the ones who had more seniority!...I think that shift had been operating close to a year before we finally did anything...When we, the fileteras started organizing ourselves, the majority of the workers did not want to be part of it. They questioned our motives for organizing a union, since we made more money than anyone else...After a while, everybody saw that it was good for us and started signing the union cards.

\textsuperscript{11} Mendoza, 24 February 1996, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{12} Mendoza, 24 February 1996, pp. 6-8.
My sister Angelica [a worker from Calliope Designs] told me: 'Look, go and talk to this man.' So, I went and talked to Newman and Alicia. I do not remember the month, but I remember that there were many of us.\(^1\)

At the beginning of March 1988, a *filetera* committee held a meeting with Sanchez and Strawbridge, requesting their assistance to organize a union for the workers at PSGF. Sanchez and Strawbridge explained to the *fileteras* the strategic steps they needed to take to form a union: the majority of the workers had to sign a petition for collective bargaining representation before they could risk holding any meetings with larger groups.

According to Sanchez, this small group of workers returned in a few days with over one hundred signatures, petitioning for SCIU representation.\(^2\) Sanchez and Strawbridge organized a meeting in the middle of March with most of the workers who signed the petition.

There were about, I would say, eighty workers that [attended the meeting]. [Prior to this meeting] some of the [*fileteras*] had already collected petitions because...we had already met with a small committee, a group of five women at PSGF. And we said to them, if there is interest, we would like for you to have the rest of the workers sign this petition. So the women collected all the signatures, a lot of signatures. Then we called our first meeting. It seemed like

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\(^{13}\) Alicia Sanchez, interview by author, 17 October 1995, tape recording, Sebastopol, California, transcription, p. 1.

eighty workers came, and they brought their families along. We told them that it is a long struggle, but things get changed. Then we said, you have to love each other, you have to accept each others' differences. Once you start the struggle, you have to finish it. So people did that and they said yes that they will do it. Then we all started clapping and cheering.\textsuperscript{15}

Francisca Bejar remembers the first meeting PSGF workers held with Sanchez and Strawbridge. She discussed the hope that workers felt as a result of having somebody willing to help them in their organizing efforts. Bejar became one of the leaders in their struggle, and she feels very thankful that the union helped the workers gain some respect from their supervisors. Bejar had first worked peeling shrimp, and had been working as a \textit{filetera} for PSGF for nine years when they began their organizing effort in 1988.

Bejar described the way workers organized their first large meeting. Workers, she explained, did not need letters, phone calls or reminders about the meeting, but rather learned about it by "word of mouth." The \textit{filetera} committee informed people about the time and date of the meeting with Sanchez and Strawbridge, and people told each other.

\textsuperscript{15} Sanchez, 17 October 1995, p. 3.
[We knew about the meeting] by word of mouth. We were told about Alicia and Newman...[and] we knew about the workers at Calliope Designs because they were already organized...The beautiful thing about it is that many people came. We all had hoped to have some changes...I remember we were a lot of workers because we could hardly fit in that big room...[and] I remember that everybody came out from that meeting with our spirits very high. Everybody felt that we were stepping into paradise. But they told us that it was not going to be an easy organizing effort...And as they said, the struggle was very hard...Alicia and Newman told us everything about organizing ourselves. They explained to us very well that if we had over fifty percent of the votes for a union, we won. But if not, we lose. That is why we had to talk very well with all the workers about the union...I remember they explained all of that. Yes I do remember everything!16

This meeting not only generated a network of resources among Mexicans in Sonoma County, but also began another equally important development. It unified local labor, peace and community forces in a common cause: the struggle for fair treatment of the Mexican workers at PSGF and Calliope Designs. Under the direction of the union organizers and help from community volunteers, workers began an effort to blend together labor, peace and community support.

Workers at PSGF took a different approach than those at Calliope Designs to inform the management of their desire to form

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16 Francisca Bejar, interview by author, 17 February 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, pp. 4-6.
a union. With the support of labor, peace and community activists, Sanchez and Strawbridge led a mass rally outside PSGF. Their goal was to press Les Amundsen, PSGF general manager, to recognize SCIU as the representative of the workers in collective bargaining.

On Monday, April 4, 1988 at noon time, between three and four hundred people¹⁷ rallied outside the PSGF plant. After everyone had gathered, Sanchez and Strawbridge delivered speeches about the poor working conditions Mexicans were experiencing at that factory. Since Amundsen would not come out to speak with the workers, Sanchez led the marchers into the plant, stopping right outside the main office to request that Amundsen recognize the union.¹⁸ She described in detail their first action.

The first action that I remember was that we had to ask for recognition from the company, voluntary recognition. We were hoping that the company would recognize the union without having to go through an election. So we planned a big rally at PSGF and that is when we asked a lot of people to come. We ended up having maybe three-hundred or four-hundred people...It was around noon or so, we did a noon rally, and we went into the plant, walked inside the plant, all of us, community and workers. and we asked for recognition. That was the first time the employer actually knew that there

¹⁸ Sanchez, 17 October 1995, pp. 3-4.
was an organizing drive going on. And of course they said no, they did not want to recognize it. And that they had to talk to their lawyers and all of that.¹⁹

The Press Democrat reported that prior to the rally, eighty percent of the approximately two hundred workers had signed authorization cards indicating a desire for union representation.²⁰ Only thirty percent of the workers needed to sign the petition cards in order to have an election for union representation.²¹

The Press Democrat also reported the presence of several unions at that rally in support of the workers. Included were the Teamsters, Sonoma County Organization of Public Employees, and the Carpenters Union, among others. Representatives of Resurrection Catholic Church and the Community Baptist Church also attended the rally. Pledge for Peace in Central America, the Rainbow Coalition, and the Peace and Justice Center were also there to advocate for equal rights for Mexican workers. The Peace and Freedom Party was represented by Eric Fried, who was running for Congress.²²

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¹⁹ Sanchez, 17 October 1995, pp. 3-4.
The Press Democrat interviewed the company manager, Les Amundsen, who refused to meet with the workers because "they were making too much noise," and that was not the way he conducted his meetings. Amundsen said that he needed to contact his lawyers before he could talk to the workers. PSGF workers, on the other hand, felt the urge to inform the community through press coverage of their rally that PSGF employees worked under difficult and unsafe conditions and that they were treated "very badly, as if they were slaves."23

PSGF workers started their campaign for an election for collective bargaining representation immediately after the April, 1988 rally. In comparison with their fellow workers from Calliope Designs, PSGF workers utilized more sophisticated organizing tactics for the union election. For the first few days of their campaign, workers wore hand-made buttons in the plant, but they soon collected funds to purchase manufactured buttons and blue tee-shirts. Both the buttons and the shirts displayed a logo of a large fish comprised of many small fish, eating a smaller (company) fish. The slogan read: Organize/Organizate.

According to interviews with PSGF workers, Herring, and Sanchez, the workers' efforts on behalf of a union organizing campaign surprised the company. Salvador Bejar stated that supervisors and managers pictured Mexican workers as people without ambition or education, whose organizing efforts would fade away a few days after the April rally.\(^\text{24}\) Bejar also mentioned that management felt that way because prior to this organizing effort, there had been two other times when workers had attempted to organize a union.\(^\text{25}\)

Mendoza stated that prior to 1988, she did not know much about unions. However, in 1988, she was determined to continue the struggle to the end. Mendoza indeed, became the leader of the PSGF union.

I do not remember the year it happened. His name was Tony, and he was from El Salvador. He was bilingual, and he was a supervisor. Even though he was a supervisor, he wanted to organize the workers...he said that we 'should have a union' and gave us [some] cards to sign. He tried to support us; he wanted us to become aware of our rights. However, when management found out, he was fired. There was also another occasion between 1971 and 1972. A Portuguese woman wanted to organize a union, and she was also fired.

\(^{24}\) Salvador Bejar, interview by author, 17 February 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 6.

After that, we did not do anything....We started organizing a union [in 1988] because, at that time, the working conditions went from bad to worse, and they were not giving us work.26

Workers held weekly meetings, where they would discuss their organizing tactics and then break into committee meetings to discuss the details of their struggle. With the assistance of community, peace and other union activists, they kept the press informed, and visited workers at their homes to talk about the benefits of organizing a union.

During their campaign, PSGF workers exhibited strong determination to win union representation. They risked their jobs, their livelihood, and in many cases their residence in the United States. Many of these workers were in the process of becoming permanent residents under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986.

IRCA provided permanent residency to over two million Mexicans who were living in the United States without documents. In the process, over one million Mexicans became legal residents in California. Before IRCA was passed in 1986, more than sixty percent of Mexicans in the United States were undocumented.

IRCA allowed two groups of undocumented Mexicans to achieve legal status. The first group needed to prove that they had been living continuously in the United States since 1982. From this group, over fifty percent of the legalized Mexicans were from California. The second group of immigrants were special agricultural workers (SAWs), who became documented by showing that they had worked in seasonal agricultural work for ninety days between May 1985 and May 1986. Over eighty-one percent of the workers achieving documented status were Mexican. California accounted for over fifty-three percent of the legalized immigrants nationally.27

In contrast with their counterparts from Calliope Designs, PSGF workers were willing to take more risks in the form of political action. Their organizing was directed toward a wider political arena than that of the workers at Calliope Designs. During and after the campaign for collective bargaining, the

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workers of PSGF organized mass marches and picket lines and involved other union, peace and community activists at a much higher level.

Sanchez believes that the reason the PSGF workers were more political than those at Calliope Designs was because the large majority of them came from the state of Michoacan. That state, she said, has historically been more political than any of the other states in Northwest Mexico. The most prominent leftist figure in Mexico, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, is from that state.

I think probably PSGF [workers had more political and union organizing experience]. And the reason is because most of the workers came from [the] state of Michoacan. Michoacan, historically, has been more political [and] more militant...It seemed [to me] that this particular group of people, from that state were much more active. They were willing to take more risks than the [workers at Calliope Designs]...I just think that is because they came from the State of Michoacan...I also found out that in that group [PSGF], many of them did not even know how to read and write in Spanish, and there were a lot more people that were not educated, formal education...It seemed [to me] that people at Calliope Designs had picked up skills here, and they also came from states in Mexico that were not in as much political unrest as the people from PSGF who came from the state of Michoacan. Even though they started the union, they were not as militant...It seemed [to me] that overall PSGF workers were more militant.28

Shortly after the PSGF workers opened their campaign for the union, the company laid off twenty fileteras—the most active union members—and fifty fish packers. In total, the company laid off seventy workers during April-June, 1988. Amundsen sent the fish and shellfish to the two other plants in Oregon and Oakland.29

Faced with this problem, workers undertook two forms of action. First, workers organized picket lines outside the PSGF premises. Second, the union filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Herring discussed the steps the union took to file the charge.

In April of 1988 the union filed an unfair labor practice charge saying that they were threatening the employees with plant closure and diversion of work because of their organizing activities. So that was one charge, with the NLRB in San Francisco. In August the regional office of the Board issued a complaint, an unfair labor practice complaint for that. For threatening employees with decrease of work because of their union activities, and telling the employees that they may close the Santa Rosa plant because of their union activities...The hearing was scheduled for October 18, 1988 on that charge and then it eventually got settled...And then, it seems to me that after the union won the election, there were layoffs, and we suspected that the reason work was slow was because they were farming out some of their processing to other plants on the coast...That charge was settled on the basis of the company posting a notice in

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29 Neil Herring, interview by author, 24 October 1995, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 5.
January 1989 saying that they would not try to interfere with the workers' rights to organize by threatening to decrease the work or close the plant.\textsuperscript{30}

Mendoza believes that the company wanted to scare the workers, to dissuade them from organizing the union. She said that in addition to laying off workers, management tried to intimidate workers by interrogating some, pulling union buttons from their shirts, and offering her and some other worker better jobs.

Mendoza said that Amundsen called her into his office and requested that she stop the union organizing. He promised her that in exchange, the company would cancel the filetera night shift, and the senior fileteras would have their working hours back. He also offered her a supervisory position. "Twenty years after I had been working for that place, he offered me a better position. I could not believe it,"\textsuperscript{31} she said. Mendoza refused to accept any of Amundsen's offerings, and she reported her conversation with Amundsen to the union members.

Despite continuing harassment by the company, the NLRB held the representation election on Monday, June 17, 1988, at 10:00 a.m.

That morning PSGF attempted to persuade the Board to postpone

\textsuperscript{30} Herring, 24 October 1995, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{31} Mendoza, 24 February 1996, p. 6.
the election, arguing that Portuguese workers did not speak Spanish and that the signs directing workers to the voting booths were only in English and Spanish. The NLRB officials conducting the election reminded PSGF management that the company had not informed the NLRB previously of any special language needs, and that the two workers of Portuguese descent who were eligible to vote both spoke fluent English.

The NLRB officials tallied the ballots. One hundred seventy-eight workers voted. One hundred thirty-seven cast ballots for SCIU, and twenty cast ballots against. There were two void ballots and nineteen challenged ballots. The election marked an overwhelming victory for the workers at PSGF, who celebrated with a party that evening.

Francisca Bejar remembers the election day clearly. For her, winning the election was a triumph because Mexicans had proven to be strong in their belief in equal rights. She also explained that

33 United States of America, p. 7.
34 United States of America, p. 7.
"the Portuguese forewoman took some women out to lunch, according to her, to celebrate the anticipated defeat of the union. And what a surprise! We won by a big margin." 35

On June 24, 1988, Littler, Mendelson, Fastiff and Tichy, attorneys representing PSGF, filed sixty objections to the election with the NLRB. The company objected to the manner in which the NLRB officers had conducted the election and requested that NLRB set aside the election. A hearing on PSGF's objections began on August 10, 1988, in Santa Rosa, California. Barbara D. Davison, NLRB hearing officer, presided over the objections hearing, which lasted twelve days.

Although Strawbridge and Sanchez had prepared the workers for the possibility of PSGF challenging the election, workers felt disappointed because they had envisioned an immediate change after the election. Workers had a difficult time understanding a law that permitted PSGF to object to an election that, according to them, was fair and legal. Everyone involved, workers, union organizers, and community members, hoped that the company would recognize the union and negotiate a contract.

Sanchez recalled the election and its aftermath:

The results of the election were incredible: one hundred thirty-seven workers voted for the union, and twenty voted against. It was a beautiful election result... The company hired Littler and Mendelson, Attorneys at Law. This is a very anti-union law firm. The minute we found out the company had hired them, we told the workers that the company was going to challenge the election. And they did it, they filed over sixty objections!

Even though you tell a worker ahead of time that the company is going to object and appeal to the legal system, I think all of us, including ourselves as organizers, we still hoped that the company would not object to the election. And that at the last minute they will not take us down this long road.36

Herring explained the complexity of the hearing process.

Despite its unfamiliarity to the workers, they did their best to understand and participate in the legal process.

Workers were very upset and puzzled about a legal system that would say you win an election by that huge a majority, but you cannot start negotiating for a contract, or let's say, the company does not have to start negotiating...I am sure I told the workers that even after the objections were resolved, if the company wanted to delay it, they could have delayed bargaining with the union for as long as two years.37

Mendoza and Salvador Bejar were union witnesses at the hearing, and they recalled their experiences with pride in their

37 Herring, 24 October 1995, pp. 3-4.
faces. According to Mendoza and Bejar, the company lawyers hoped to intimidate them by asking the same question several times.

Mendoza described the nervousness she felt during the hearing process.

The company hired the best anti-union law firm from San Francisco to challenge the election. The Company complained about the conduct of the election. They said that there was nobody who spoke Portuguese fluently, and that the Portuguese speaking workers did not have representation. However, Portuguese people held supervisor or management jobs, and they could not vote. I was accused of forcing people to vote in favor of the union. They argued that I forced them when people signed the petition form. The company also accused us of fundraising money to give it to people, so that they would vote for us.

When I went to testify, I was very nervous--well, not that much. I had never been involved in something like that, so I was afraid and kept wondering what the lawyers were going to ask me. Well, yes, they asked questions, but that was not so bad. I calmed myself down.38

Bejar laughed at the accusations the company made against him and his co-workers and described his experience during the hearing.

I remember I went to testify. Myself and other workers were accused of pressuring other workers to vote for the union. We were also accused of saying things to the Anglo and Portuguese supervisors. I remember now. Yes, as I told you previously. We used to get together and talk among ourselves. So I went to testify. We were approximately ten people, men and women. The company lawyers asked us

questions about the campaign for the union election, then Mr. Neil Herring, our lawyer, asked us different questions. At the end we proved that we did not insult nor threaten the white and Portuguese supervisors.39

The union organized a daily "campaign for justice" picket-line outside the front gates of PSGF, because two weeks after the election the company laid off twenty-seven workers and drastically reduced the working hours of the rest. In a two week period, most of the workers only worked ten to fifteen hours. Gomez stated that the lack of work was unusual for PSGF workers, because there were all kinds of fish to clean and pack all year round. Winter was the crab season, spring was the dover and rock cod season. Summer and fall were the shrimp and salmon season. Gomez recalled that the workers believed the lack of work resulted from the company's decision to send fish to other plants for processing.40

Kaplan remembers the support workers received from the community during the noontime picket lines. He also remembers the efforts community members and workers made to inform people about their "campaign for justice."41

40 Gomez, 1 November 1995, p. 6.
41 Paul Kaplan, interview by author, 28 January 1996, tape recording, Dillon Beach, California, transcription. p. 4.
There were a series of noontime rallies at the plant gate that we used to build support, and there was a big effort to distribute leaflets after the election to all sections of the community, urging them to put pressure on the company to recognize the union. I remember going to churches with workers to talk to the churches about the campaign for justice...As I recall, the campaign started in the middle of the summer...We had to stop it because it was not productive, and the workers organized other activities.42

It was a difficult time for PSGF workers. They had won an election for collective bargaining representation, yet they could not negotiate a labor contract with the company. Rumors began to spread among the workers that the company was planning to declare bankruptcy because of the union organizing.43 These rumors worried the workers, because the company was simultaneously sending fish to Bodega Bay, Oakland and Oregon to be processed and packed.44 Workers became desperate for work and money. To overcome their desperate situation and to keep up their morale, workers organized themselves into different committees to appeal to the community for moral and financial support.

The large majority of the workers continued to work for a few hours a week and also received food and money--distributed in

equal shares--from a fund that other unions, churches, peace groups and community members donated to the workers' cause. However, those donations were not sufficient to support approximately two hundred workers. Therefore, some workers decided to apply for unemployment benefits, others took part-time employment in other factories, and a few left the company. According to Del Campo, she had to leave because she was a single mother of three, and she had many expenses to cover. Del Campo began to commute to San Francisco to work for other fish processing companies. She explained that she felt bad about abandoning the struggle, because she had been one of the main organizers. She later recognized that she had held expectations that there would be fast solutions to the workers' problems, and that was not what happened at PSGF.

Sanchez and Strawbridge explained to the workers that following the hearing, the NLRB would take a few months to rule on certification of the union as the collective bargaining representative. Consequently, SCIU needed to find new avenues to assist and protect workers inside the plant. Although SCIU was not

yet certified to represent the workers in the bargaining unit,

Herring's expertise in labor laws allowed him to battle the
company on legal grounds, even without a union. His first action in
this regard was to charge the company with unfair labor practices
for threatening the workers with closing the plant.

That charge was settled on the basis of the company
posting notices in January 1989, saying that they would not
try to interfere with the workers' rights to organize by
threatening to decrease the work or close the plant...

In the meantime the union could not get the company to
bargain about a contract, but the union did take on the
workers' grievances informally. The company would not
admit openly it was recognizing the union, but there were
many contacts between the company and us, and things
happened, you know. Some of our people were disciplined and
we would complain to the company as a union, or we would
file unfair labor practice charges. Or, we would fight their
unemployment cases. I mean, there were a lot of attempts to
intimidate the people that the company identified as the
organizers.47

In November 1988, Herring took a gigantic step by suing PSGF
on behalf of the union for unlawfully charging the workers for their
protective gear. Under Herring's representation, workers at PSGF
filed a class action complaint in the Sonoma County Superior Court
in early November 1988, claiming that the company had violated

state laws by charging workers the cost of their protective gear.48

According to the suit, over two hundred workers were unlawfully charged for protective gloves, aprons, and boots.

A story in The Press Democrat dated Tuesday, November 15, 1988 reported that Herring filed the suit against the company because employers are responsible for furnishing workers with protective gear that is necessary to insure safe working conditions. According to the article, company lawyers argued that aprons, boots, and gloves do not qualify as "protective equipment" under federal and state laws. "General manager Les Amundsen said the company offers these items at cost to workers who wish to wear them."49 In response, workers stated that handling, filleting and packing of fish forces them to work in cold, wet conditions that require protective clothes. "'We have no choice. It is very necessary to use protective gear, or we will get wet and pricked by fish bones,' said Celia Mendoza, a fishery worker for twenty-one years."50 Herring requested that the company repay $200 per

49 Delgado, 15 November 1988, Sec. B. pp. 3-4.
person to more than two hundred workers who had worked at PSGF during the three years prior to November, 1988.\textsuperscript{51}

Mendoza reported that new workers were told on their first day of work that they should bring their own protective gear or buy it from the company.\textsuperscript{52} In addition to protective gear (all but gloves), the company also charged \textit{fileteras} for the knife sharpeners they needed to perform their job duties. Below is a list of the amounts workers were charged.

\begin{itemize}
  \item Aprons: $3$ to $13$ depending on the quality
  \item Boots: $15$
  \item Gloves: $1.35$ to $2$ depending on the quality
  \item Knives: $6$ for men who do heavy butcher work
  \item Sharpeners: $15$ to $18$ each.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{itemize}

Herring recalls the suit with a sparkle in his eyes. He was doing whatever he could to keep the workers' morale high.

We had this other law suit for the safety equipment, forcing the company to provide gloves, boots and aprons. In other words, the company would require the workers to wear that stuff, but would make them pay for it. And I think also, there was a question about knives that the workers had to use, maybe they had to use their own knives. So we sued the company in Superior Court for all the workers, and we ended up settling with the company basically with them giving us what we had sued for, that they will pay for all this.

\textsuperscript{51} Herring, 24 October 1995, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{52} Mendoza, 24 February 1996, p. 12.
protective gear. And I think it was a morale booster because, you know, the workers saw that it was possible to take the company on. Again the problem is, the more success you have in the legal arena, the less people rely on their own power.54

The lawsuit was a victory for the workers when it was finally settled in late April, 1990. The company agreed to pay $19,000 to workers who had paid for their own protective gear since January 1986. Seven hundred workers were paid between twenty-five cents and $200.00, depending on how much they had worked since January 1986, and what types of protective gear they had bought from the company between the years 1986 and 1990.55

The Press Democrat reported on May 1, 1990 that the company management did not acknowledge that they had violated government laws by charging workers for the protective gear. However, the paper said that the company "decided to settle the lawsuit to avoid two or three years of litigation that would have been far more expensive than reimbursement money for work gear."56

On June 15, 1989, PSGF workers were filled with happiness when Sanchez and Strawbridge informed them that the NLRB in

54 Herring, 24 October 1995, p. 8.
Washington had ruled in favor of certifying SCIU as the collective bargaining representative of the PSGF workers. Sanchez recalls that day with excitement because workers had to wait one year to be certified and, according to her, workers were becoming anxious about certification.

It took a long time, months. And then finally we received the decision from the NLRB saying that we were certified...If the company had decided to challenge the NLRB decision, the next recourse the company had was to appeal to the Ninth Circuit Court...[However], a year later we were officially certified by the Washington DC office...and the NLRB's ruling said: "This election was valid; the union is certified." The company then would decide whether to appeal to the courts...So at that time, the company came back and said that they will not appeal any further and requested us to sit down and talk about negotiation.\textsuperscript{57}

Mendoza and Francisca Bejar remember the hardships they experienced between June 17, 1988 and June 15, 1989 while waiting for SCIU to be recognized by the NLRB as the bargaining representative for the workers. For them and many other workers that year was very difficult because they did not have much work, and people's energy and hopes were fading away.

Bejar felt that since she had started the struggle, she had to finish it.

\textsuperscript{57} Sanchez, 17 October 1995, pp. 14-16.
Many people felt like everything we had hoped for and battled for was evaporating. They felt like they did not want to continue in the struggle. Can you imagine? Some of the active people were fired. Those who stayed working, their working hours were tremendously reduced. It became very hard to continue in the struggle. But more than anything else we had the spirit to continue the struggle. If we had agreed from the beginning not to stop, we had to continue. Even the people that got fired, they continued coming to support us in the meetings, marches, and the picket lines. We were extremely happy when we were certified after a year of hard struggle.58

Mendoza felt that workers who did not understand the struggle held her (and others) responsible for the lack of work, and these workers questioned the importance of the union election.

It took exactly a year for the NLRB to decide about the union. We continued working--less work, of course, the company continued taking the fish someplace else. The workers' morale was low...Some people got desperate because of the lack of work. I did not get frustrated, I understood the problems of organizing a union. One time, I got very upset because one of the Portuguese supervisors told me: "See what you won with your union? All you have achieved is losing work." I became very upset and I said to her: "That is okay, I am not so interested in working. What I am interested in is to stopping the bad treatment towards Mexicans, and for you to stop doing things to people that you are not supposed to do. We finally grew tired of your bad treatment." After the union election, they all had to stop mistreating us because they knew that Neil [Herring] would protect us. That was a big victory for us. And I always reminded the workers and supervisors of that.59

At the end of June 1989, the company decided not to appeal to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals to overrule the NLRB decision that certified SCIU as the bargaining agent for the workers at PSGF. Coincidentally, in the same week as the NLRB ruling, the company laid off twenty-seven men who drove trucks and worked on machines. The company attributed the layoffs to "lack of work."\(^\text{60}\)

The lawyers representing PSGF contacted SCIU to begin negotiations for a labor contract. This was the beginning of a laborious negotiation process: nearly three years passed before a contract was finally signed on February 22, 1991.

Herring believes that SCIU should have been prepared with a contract proposal long before the lawyers for PSGF approached SCIU with their contract proposal. He saw a weakness in SCIU leadership because when PSGF presented its first proposal, Sanchez and Strawbridge reacted to it but did not have a draft proposal ready to counter the company's proposal.

As the company's contract proposal thus became the basis for the negotiations, some workers were not offered substantial vacation, holidays, sick leave and insurance gains. A terrible irony resulted for the *fileteras* under this initial contract proposal: the *fileteras* had initiated the union organizing, and yet they did not receive full health insurance benefits because the contract stipulated that only full time workers could receive full health benefits.

Mendoza explained that she felt abandoned because she had struggled for the union so long, and after waiting almost twenty years for substantial benefits, she did not receive any of the negotiated benefits.

It was the *fileteras* who started the organizing, and the *fileteras* could not receive health insurance coverage because [we] did not work more than thirty hours a week. A person who worked full time received full health insurance coverage. The people who did not work full time had to pay part of their health insurance. *Fileteras* were the only people who did not work full time. And the union did not do anything to protect us. I hardly remember, but no, nothing.61

Sanchez recalls the negotiations with PSGF, and she stated that negotiations took close to three years because the company

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61 Celia Mendoza, interview by author, 16 March 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 2.
did not want to agree to union security, and it was offering very little to the workers.

It was at the beginning of 1990(sic)\textsuperscript{62} when we signed the contract. We had been negotiating with them for a while, but the only thing they were giving was a small increase in wages. The wages were not raised very high. But they gave some insurance to the workers and some holidays. I think the hardest aspect in the contract was that workers could not keep the union security and we lost that one. Because of the absence of union security, we started collecting signatures to do a boycott, and we presented thousands of signatures to the company. We informed them that if they did not sign a contract with union security, we would soon start a boycott on their fish...Finally it was close to three years later that the company agreed to sign a contract. On that day that we signed the contract, as I mentioned, all the people who were present were all women.

And we signed it, and we voted to have a contract. So three years later, we voted among the workers, whether they accepted or not the contract. It was not the best contract because they had to come from nothing to just a little [wage raise], not as much as we would have liked to have gotten them. But they obtained vacation, holidays and had some insurance.\textsuperscript{63}

In three years of struggling for a better contract for the workers, SCIU never instituted a serious boycott in restaurants and food stores that sold PSGF products. The community petitions were never used for any boycotting purpose, and the two other

\textsuperscript{62} Sanchez stated in her interview that the contract was signed in 1990. Union files showed that the contract was signed on February 22, 1991.

PSGF plants were never boycotted. All the plans Sanchez described above never matured because according to Sanchez, the company started negotiating just about the time Sanchez was ready to launch the boycott.

The contract ratified by PSGF workers in 1991 was not much different from the initial contract proposal in 1989. The senior workers did not obtain any kind of seniority-based job security. The fileteras did not receive substantial health benefits. The company was asking them to pay almost eighty percent of their health insurance coverage.64

In September 1993, two years after the contract was signed, the company closed its doors, leaving over one hundred workers without any pension or compensation for the years they had worked for PSGF. With a combination of sadness and bitterness, Mendoza described the lack of support from the union when the plant closed. Mendoza discussed her experiences at that time.

The company was closed in September of 1993. After we affiliated with SEIU--well, I had been working for Point Saint George Fisheries for close to twenty-five years--I wanted to talk to the union representative. I do not remember his name right now --a man from San Francisco because, after affiliation, our representation was moved to

64 Mendoza, 16 March 1996, pp. 3-5.
San Francisco. So, I called him to find out what I could do to protect myself when the company closed down. I had been working for many years, and I did not receive any compensation from them. However, I was never able to see him. I do not remember when Alicia left the union. She did not have a meeting with us, nor explain to us the reasons for her leaving SCIU. We only knew about it when we called her to find out about what kind of rights we had with PSGF closing. She told us that she was going to be working in Oakland and that we had been transferred to the Janitors Local in San Francisco. Alicia told us that she was not going to be our union representative because she was transferred to another local.

I was unable to find another job, and I was left without retirement and a job. A month later one of the foremen called me to ask me to work for them in a new company they had opened in Bodega Bay. So I agreed and it is where I am now working. We are six fileteras and four packers.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Mendoza, 16 March 1996, p. 5.
3. Affiliation and subsequent demise of SCIU

At the beginning of 1989, Strawbridge and Sanchez, the union organizers, decided to seek affiliation with Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local 707. According to Sanchez, she and Strawbridge had grown exhausted from holding two full time jobs. In addition to the countless hours they were spending as unpaid organizers for SCIU, Sanchez worked full time for California Human Development Corporation (CHDC), and Strawbridge was conducting wage-and-hour investigations for local attorneys.¹

Sanchez explained that after several discussions between her and Strawbridge, he initiated the steps towards affiliation with SEIU and shortly after, SEIU requested an affiliation proposal from Strawbridge.² SEIU requested that the proposal include winning a contract with Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF), a commitment that SCIU start collecting dues, and additionally, the prompt

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¹ Alicia Sanchez, interview by author, 17 October 1995, tape recording, Sebastopol, California, transcription, p. 16.
² Alicia Sanchez, interview by author, 6 November, 1995, tape recording, Sebastopol, California, transcription, p. 1.
organizing of other plants. The proposal was presented on February 2, 1989. Both parties signed the affiliation agreement on March 26, 1989.3

After presenting the proposal to SEIU, Sanchez and Strawbridge met with the rank and file to inform the workers of the SCIU-SEIU affiliation proposal. From the beginning of SCIU's formation, workers had resisted the idea of affiliation with other unions, because they wanted to form their own Latino union and to maintain their autonomy. However, when Sanchez and Strawbridge presented the proposal to the workers, they agreed to hold a secret ballot election. According to Sanchez, a Catholic priest conducted the election. The results showed that workers were overwhelmingly in favor of affiliation.4 Eighty-four workers voted for affiliation, three against, and one vote was challenged.5, 6

SCIU's decision to affiliate brought immediate benefits to the union. SEIU offered two paid union organizing positions to

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4 Sanchez, 6 November 1995, p. 1.
5 SCIU archives, February 16 and 17, 1989.
6 During the interviewing process, Sanchez indicated that a Catholic priest conducted the election for affiliation. The union files showed that a community member, Lucy Forrest, counted the votes and stated with her signature that the number of votes described above were counted by her.
SCIU. According to Sanchez, workers overwhelmingly decided that those two paid positions should go to her and Strawbridge because they had been donating their time to the union for over a year.7

Affiliation benefited Sanchez and Strawbridge because they began earning an income from their union organizing work. This enabled them to leave their other full-time jobs and, according to Sanchez, to focus their efforts only on SCIU.

In addition to the creation of paid positions for Strawbridge and Sanchez, SCIU made another important structural change at this time. Sanchez stated that soon after affiliation the decision was made to elect two executive boards, one representing the Calliope Designs workers and the other representing PSGF workers, to help insure SCIU's autonomy in decision making.8

The decision to affiliate reflected a change in the SCIU membership's attitude toward affiliation. Approximately one year earlier, in early February 1988, the workers from Calliope Designs had expressed strong opposition to affiliating to other unions. During the interviewing process, the workers' answers were not clear about their reasons for remaining independent, or for

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7 Sanchez, pp. 4-5
8 Sanchez, 6 November 1995, p. 1.
subsequently affiliating. Furthermore, when they were questioned about the election process and the subsequent affiliation, none of the workers from either plant remembered the process of affiliation or the formation of the boards.

It is difficult to assess why workers did not remember the affiliation process. A possible explanation for the Calliope Designs workers would be that they were overwhelmed by the problems they were still having at work. They were working without a contract, and the union seemed unable to assist them in their struggles with the company owners. PSGF workers were similarly absorbed at their workplace: participating in weekly picket lines outside the plant, waiting for union certification from the NLRB, and in the process of winning a major suit against the company on the issue of protective gear.

In early 1990, several workers from the Calistoga Bottling Company in Napa County approached Sanchez and Strawbridge, seeking help in organizing a union at their worksite. A large majority of people working there were Mexicans, and they felt they
were clearly being discriminated against. With encouragement from SEIU International, Sanchez and Strawbridge undertook this new organizing effort.

It was my understanding that [SEIU] suggested [that] Alicia and Newman downplay the racist relations that the company was using to divide people...They [SEIU] said it would create more problems, it would be more divisive if [they] fought it. When racism at work is downplayed, [you lose] the ability to win over workers from different [racial] backgrounds [to unite] because of their common interests as workers. If the [organizers] play into [the racism], [they] play into the natural segregation...I think that is what happened...It was a pretty devastating loss, considering the time and energy that had been put in, and it had an effect on everything else, because if they had come back from Calistoga with a victory, it would have added to, not taken away from, what had happened in Sonoma County [with the organizing of SCIU]...It was demoralizing for the [PSGF and Calliope Designs] workers.9

The union lost the Calistoga Bottling election in August of 1990, which was devastating for SCIU.10 Workers from the other two companies already felt abandoned by their union, and by their two organizers.11 PSGF workers had signed a contract that did not contain significant improvements in working conditions or wage

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11 Celia Mendoza, interview by author, 20 October 1996, Santa Rosa, California,
increases. Calliope Designs workers had continued working without a contract, as they had not been successful in negotiations.

Strawbridge left the union at the end of 1991, and Sanchez faced several difficulties at that time. SEIU International unilaterally decided that she would no longer serve SCIU under the aegis of Local 707 in Sonoma County. SEIU assigned Sanchez to SEIU Local 87, the Janitors Local in San Francisco. The SCIU membership had no voice in the decision.

It was hard because Local 87 was in San Francisco, and they were Janitors. SCIU was put in a hard position. If SCIU wanted to have representation, its members had to go to San Francisco...After a year of working for Local 87, I resigned from my position in 1992. I think it was at that time that PSGF workers and Calliope Designs workers suffered, because Local 87 hired another Business Representative to come and service the SCIU workers...But, it was not the same because the workers, [by then], had been so used to having me as their union organizer, it was very difficult for them to work with this person...It was also very hard for me to leave Local 87 and SCIU. SCIU lasted probably one more year because the contract at PSGF was due for review and Calliope Designs had recently closed its doors.¹²

At the beginning of 1993, Calliope Designs closed its Santa Rosa plant and moved to Tijuana, Mexico, leaving the SCIU workers unemployed and without any compensation. PSGF was closed in

August of 1993. Workers in both plants were compelled to seek other employment. In August of 1993, SCIU ceased to exist. Three years later, most of the workers interviewed still worked in manufacturing, and very few were unionized.
Conclusion

When the workers of Calliope Designs and Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF) began their organizing process, they did not have union organizing experience, nor knowledge of United States labor laws. They did not have funds to support their struggles, and a large majority of them were not permanent residents in the United States. Yet, they overcame these obstacles to gain union representation at both sites.

The workers at Calliope Designs carried out and sustained a twelve-week strike and organized a consumer boycott of Calliope Designs ornaments. The PSGF workers endured a year of management-initiated court battles to gain union recognition. They also established regular picket-lines outside PSGF premises and a consumer boycott of PSGF products. They successfully initiated and won a lawsuit over the issue of protective gear and were able to sign a union contract in 1991. Workers at both plants organized numerous community rallies and marches, successfully building support for their struggle among other unions and peace and justice community groups.
The leadership and experience of Sanchez and Strawbridge was crucial to the development of SCIU. Without their assistance, it is highly unlikely that the workers could have mounted a union organizing effort of such magnitude. Sanchez and Strawbridge also utilized their contacts within the labor movement and the peace and justice community, and introduced the workers to both. However, their inexperience with contract negotiations proved to be a crucial weakness with a deleterious effect on the union.

The organizing progressed because the workers stood ready to take serious steps to remedy their working situation, and Sanchez and Strawbridge exhibited a willingness to donate countless hours without monetary compensation. Sanchez and Strawbridge guided the workers in a grass-roots union organizing in which other unions, the peace movement, the Catholic Church and Latino and Anglo activists supported them in their efforts.

Calliope Designs and PSGF workers formed strong connections with workers from other unions, especially with the members of the United Farm Workers (UFW) Union. Prior to 1988, the UFW did not have unionized workers in Sonoma or Napa counties. Soon after SCIU workers started their organizing, the UFW came to their
assistance with large amounts of food for the Calliope Designs workers on strike and for the PSGF workers who had been laid off. The UFW also supported the strikers on their picket lines with the presence of farm workers.

This relationship in turn benefited the UFW during the winery organizing drive they launched in Napa County in 1990. During the UFW organizing efforts, a large number of SCIU workers joined farmworkers on their picket lines and in their grape boycott in Sonoma and Napa Counties. Sanchez recalls how empowered SCIU workers became as a result of their contact with other workers experiencing similar work troubles. Sanchez also mentioned that the kinship among workers grew very strong:

Other unions and organizations [became] aware that this incredible group of Mexican workers were capable of being organized, capable of fighting, and were actually very militant and determined to better their working conditions...We helped other organizations and unions with leafleting, and picket lines because we became very good at picket line duty...We also had a political impact. Workers became more active in organizations. For example, the Faith Based Organizing Committee targets people working in the community politically. Some of our [union] members became members of that group and advanced themselves politically.¹

¹ Alicia Sanchez, interview by author, 6 November 1995, tape recording, Sebastopol, California, transcription, p. 8.
The formation of the union and the new relationships workers built with workers and community supporters exerted a tremendous influence on the lives of the workers and union organizers. Several of the workers emphasized that their union experience caused them to seek and obtain employment with better working conditions and wages. Furthermore, workers explained that because of their newly assertive behavior, the treatment they receive from their fellow workers and supervisors is more respectful.

The experience these workers gained has had repercussions in broader social and political issues. The Mexican community in Sonoma County became very active in 1994 against Proposition 187, and several of the SCIU members participated actively in the campaign against this Proposition. California Governor Pete Wilson strongly supported Proposition 187, which among other provisions would have prevented children of undocumented immigrants from receiving free education, health care and any other kind of social services. Thus, the original organizing efforts of SCIU have had a ripple effect reaching even into the electoral system.2

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2 Celia Mendoza, interview by author, 2 October 1996, Santa Rosa, California.
Sanchez, Strawbridge, and Edward Kehoe, an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor, founded the "SCIU Labor School" in 1989 in response to the SCIU membership's expressed desire to learn English. Sanchez, Strawbridge and Kehoe established a school that provided language instruction to Mexican workers in a familiar environment. Enrollment quickly grew beyond the SCIU membership. Initially, SCIU hired Kehoe to teach one beginning ESL class at the Labor Center in Santa Rosa, where SCIU rented office space. Soon after, they approached California Human Development Corporation (CHDC) to fund SCIU's ESL Class. Kehoe stated that CHDC funded the class through the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), the amnesty immigration program. To qualify for this program, people were required to study English for forty hours. CHDC paid Kehoe's salary and SCIU provided the space. As the number of students increased, SCIU's ESL classes rented space from the Carpenters Union. However, just as the classes increased in numbers, CHDC terminated its funding in 1992 due to the ending of the amnesty program. Sanchez and Kehoe saw how beneficial the

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3 Edward Kehoe, interview by author, 14 October 1996, Santa Rosa, California.
4 Kehoe, 14 October 1996.
5 Kehoe, 14 October 1996.
ESL classes were for the Mexican community, and they did not want to close the school. Therefore, Sanchez and Kehoe, the school director, presented a proposal to Santa Rosa Junior College to fund the ESL classes. The college readily agreed. During the period of SCIU's demise, the name of the school changed to La Escuela del Centro de Trabajadores (Workers' Center School). At present, beginning ESL classes at the Labor Center continue to be funded by the college.6 The program has two morning ESL classes and five evening ESL classes. Additionally, the school offers a General Education Diploma (GED) class in Spanish, which enables workers to obtain the equivalent of a high school diploma. These classes serve approximately three-hundred and fifty students who attend classes regularly.7

According to Kehoe, La Escuela del Centro de Trabajadores is a lasting result of the organizing work that was done.8 The school is very popular in the Mexican community, and its enrollment grows every semester. The school consistently has a waiting list for these classes.

6 Kehoe, 14 October 1996.
7 Edward Kehoe, interview by author, 15 October 1996, Santa Rosa, California.
8 Kehoe, 14 October 1996.
Some of these Mexican workers continued their education beyond the Workers School courses. Several women and a few men from SCIU began attending SRJC at the main campus, completing the ESL program and moving on to College English level courses. A few workers pursued vocational training.

Many workers who were not permanent residents in this country obtained permanent residency through IRCA, and many began actively seeking citizenship. They wanted to have political voice and power through gaining the right to vote.

Several of the women workers became active in their communities. Celia Mendoza and Susana Garcia, a PSGF worker, have been actively recruiting permanent residents to apply for their citizenship, resulting in many newly eligible voters for the 1996 presidential elections. Both women expressed that they would not have had the courage nor the political understanding to do this work prior to their union organizing experience. Garcia states that her new political awareness moved her to vote for the political candidates she felt would help the Latino community in Sonoma County.
I became a United States permanent resident, and later a citizen. I did it because I wanted to have the power to vote. In fact, I have been active in politics since I became a union member, regardless of my residency status, I could have been active even if I was undocumented. I am also involved in electoral politics because our people—Latino people—are becoming citizens, but they are not fully aware how our government works. I think it is important for our people to become educated in politics, so that they know what these people in power are doing for us, or against us.9

Francisca Bejar has become very vocal and active in the school district in which she resides. Bejar was instrumental in bringing after school child care to the elementary school her children attend. She acknowledged that Strawbridge and Sanchez were good role models for her and other Mexican women striving to better their lives for their future and their children.10

Sara Ochoa, who also became very militant as a result of the union organizing, stated:

One of the experiences I learned about was a union and a strike. Before [my own experience], I used to look at people being on strike, and I had no idea what it was all about. I thought to myself: "Those people are crazy, they are crazy because they do not want to work." Now when I see people on strike, I truly respect that strike because I know how much

9 Susana Garcia, interview by author, 3 November 1996, Santa Rosa, California,
10 Francisca Bejar, interview by author, 5 October 1996, Santa Rosa, California,
those people are suffering. I support them morally, or I go to the picket line, because I know what they are fighting for...I will never cross a picket line.11

Paulina Martinez is an excellent example of the changes experienced by some of the Mexican women who participated in the union organizing. Her suffering during the strike and the strong cohesiveness of the strikers provided her with a firm belief that only a union keeps workers together in their struggle.

We did not achieve [with the strike] what we wanted. I do not think it was a victory. But, I do not think it was a defeat because we had proven that we, as Mexicans, also have rights, and that we can also do things in this country. So, if we unite ourselves, we could do it again. It [the union] gave me much more strength.

I learned a lot [from the union]. [The union] gave me much more strength. I, as a worker go to work, and it does not matter what kind of a patron I have. He can be a nice person, but it does not matter because they [patrones] always see the worker as that: simply a worker. Patrones see workers as money machines--that all we do is produce for them. When the worker cannot produce any more for the patron, they lay us off or fire us. Without any regard [of] how good we were or how much we produced for them. For that reason, I personally, in my job--the patron and her daughter; I do not care for them. If I feel like it, I greet them. Otherwise, I just keep on

Why? Because they are paying me for how much I can produce for them. They are not paying me for being nice to them. I realized that not everything is quite nice when the patron comes and says "Hi." I changed.

Paulina Martinez, interview by author, 27 April 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 14.

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Sonoma County Industrial Union files.
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Second Part

Calliope Designs workers

Hernandez, Adolfinia
Jimenez, Martha and Mario
Martinez, Paulina
Ochoa, Sara
Pulido, Elena

Point St. George Fisheries

Bejar, Francisca and Salvador
Del Campo Martin, Julieta
Garcia, Susana
Gomez, Agueda
Mendoza, Celia

Union Organizers
Herring, Neil (Union lawyer)
Sanchez, Alicia
Strawbridge, Newman

Community Members
Briano, Christina
Kaplan, Paul
Kehoe, Edward
Mario and Martha Jimenez, workers
Calliope Designs

Q Where do you come from?

A: Martha: I am from Michoacan.
    Mario: I am from Nayarit, Mexico.

Q For how long have you been living in California?

A: Martha: 17 years.
    Mario: 16 years.

Q: Did you have union organizing experience in Mexico?

A: No. Mario: The town where I grew up was a very small town, I remember that when I was in school the total population was 13,000 people. Later on, we moved to another town, even smaller. There were no more than 80 houses, it was an agricultural area.
    Martha: I lived in a small town and I did not work.

Q When you came to California, what was your first job?

A: Martha: I worked the night shift at a school for *chamacos rebeldes* (rebellious teens) that are taken to the youth correctional facility. I was just a *vigilante* (teen supervisor) at night time. [I found that job by] things of destiny.

Q How about you, Mario? What was your first job in California?

A: Well, picking apples. No unions or anything like that. Just work.

Q For how long had you worked at Calliope Designs?

A: Martha: I worked for approximately 10 years.
    Mario: I started working at Calliope Designs in 1981, 8 years.

Q When you started working there, was the company located at Tesconi Circle?
A: Martha: No, it was close to K-Mart, and it was a smaller factory.
   Mario: When I started working there it was already located at
   Tesconi Circle.

Q Did you start doing the *Monitos* (Ornaments) by piece rate?

A: Martha: We always worked by piece rate.
   Mario: There was a training period.
   Martha: They only paid you by the hour during the training. And when
   you did not work fast, they paid you the minimum wage.

Q For how long were you trained?

A: Mario: Two months.

Q How many workers were at Calliope Designs when you started
   organizing the union?

A: Mario: I think 20 or 17.

Q What was the workers' racial breakdown?

A: Martha: When we started there were mostly Mexicans.
   Mario: No, there were lots of *gueras* (white women), there were one
   or two tables of *gueros* and there was only Doña Elena, Josefina, Sara,
   *Prieta* (Dark One -- (Consuelo Zavala).
   Martha: Then when we started the organizing efforts--we called it a
   union--we did not know, we just stopped working just like that on the
   spot.

Q Before we discuss the organizing efforts, what made you arrive at
   the conclusion to stop working?

A: Martha: The real truth, the real truth. I never had the idea of how the
   stoppage happened. I do not have any recollection of who had that idea.

Q How about you, Mario? Do you remember?
A: Martha: I only remember that they made an appointment at the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) and then we were introduced to Alicia [Sanchez] and Newman [Strawbridge]. And that is how everything got started.

Q: But do you remember that before that, you [your group] decided not to work on a Monday? Because you had already several working problems, such as the boss reducing the piece rate pay?

A: Mario: Oh, yes, yes. Before Alicia and Newman there were some ornaments that were not made very frequently, only seasonally. Around July or August. When the harvest time was arriving, the grape picking. There were some ornaments that had young women riding them. Or Caballeros con Armadura.

Martha: They [the owners] took them to fairs.

Mario: Yes, to fairs. And then they had orders. So they paid for those ornaments up to $2.50.

Martha: The least paid to you was $1.50. And all of the sudden, we were paid eighty cents.

Q: Why? Do you remember when that happened?

A: Mario: I think we made those monitos for like 2 or 3 years. So one day a co-worker was told that—this co-worker used to talked to the patron [employer]. Maria, Dona Elena's [Dona is a term of respect given to, older women] daughter. She worked there. So, one day she told me: No, you know what? The patron said that it was time for the company to make money and not only the workers because he used to like to go to Mexico. I do not know if he still likes it. But, he used to go there for vacation. And often he would talk about his trips and what places he had visited. He did not like touristic places, but he liked to travel through little towns and villages. He liked to collect antiques and crafts.

Martha: Because his house is all decorated with antiques, his furniture is all antiques. You do not see a modern piece of furniture. They do not even have closets, they have roperotes [large armoirs] like ours.

Q: Did he invite you to parties at his house?

A: Martha: No! When he would travel to Mexico, he would ask Mario to water his plants, so since they did not have curtains, and you had to water
the plants all around the house, you could see inside very well.
    Mario: His house had an alarm and was all secured.

Q  What happened when he told Maria about the company making more money and not the workers?

A: Martha: Each year they would reduce from ten to twenty cents from each ornament.
    Mario: So then, we would ask her to ask him—because she was bilingual and she could communicate with the *patron*, so through that way I gathered information about what was happening. Then I would talk with the others, just like any talk. So they did not like quite well what was happening. No, I just told them what Maria told me about the *patron's* plans. And I would always ask what their conversations were all about. And she would tell me: No, the *patron* says that he had enough about the workers making more money than the company. Now, it was the company's turn to make money. So he started reducing the pay. Ten cents, twenty cents each piece. So, can you imagine twenty cents multiplied by eighty, it was a lot. Your salary was reduced a lot.
    Martha: What was even worse, was that at the end of the year, they would set a minimum wage and they would put the rest to turn it into company bonuses.

Q  How was that? Can you explain?

A: Martha: For example, they set a salary for you, that you earn, lets say $5.00 an hour. Whatever was over $5.00 they put it as bonus. So they would give the bonus to the workers. And, they did not pay taxes for the money that you have earned. This is how they avoid paying taxes. If you made ornaments that cost $6.00, he would just pay you $5.00 and he kept the dollar left. At the end of the year they counted that money as bonus, a gift to the workers from the company. But that was not bonus! That was money the worker had earned, and they did not pay taxes. When we talked to the *patrona* [woman employer] about it, she would say that she did not know anything about it! In all jobs, the first ones to know everything are the employers.

Q  So, what happened with the ornaments' reduction pay reductions? What motivated you to organize, to leave your work on Martin Luther King Day in 1988?
A: Mario: There were meetings. Sometimes he would have meetings, so we would talk to him, and Maria would translate for us. Or, sometimes we would just guess. So we asked him: What was that? Why was he reducing the ornaments so much since we killed ourselves to make a little bit more money than other people. We could even bring work to the house. During the night time you would make, for example, little presents. You would make them in your house, little balls, candy canes to decorate the Christmas trees, etc. In this way, you worked 2 to 3 hours in your house. Then, the next day, you could make more money. For example, there were some ornaments that were paid at ninety cents. It was a little Christmas tree with two presents, a ball and a little bear.

Martha: They used to control your salary. They would give you ornaments so that you could never make more than $12,000 or $13,000 a year. You never made more than that. They controlled your salary!

Mario: For example, there were times when you could make $100.00 a day working 2 to 3 hours in your house, making presents, little balls, stars, everything you needed to decorate your little tree. Then you just went to work the next morning and put it all together. So we were paid ninety cents for that little tree, and if you made 120, you made over $100. But the next day, they would give you ornaments of a different type from which you could make $25 or $30 a day.

Could you decide what ornaments you wanted to make?

A: Mario: No, because they decided that the previous day. They would make a list of what ornaments each person was going to make. In this way, you knew what you were going to make the next day. That helped us when we made fancy ornaments because we took work to our house, and the next day we made over 120, 130 ornaments. But the following day you got one from which you only made $14 a day. The pay was paid by piece all the time. So we started getting very upset, and we told him not to do that. That he had good business, and his sales were increasing. And our salaries, instead of going up, were going down. We were not pleased. We tried to talk to him. We told him that everything in the store was very expensive, and it was not enough the money that we took home. And we had to pay rent that kept rising all the time. So he would say that there was lots of competition and that the ornaments' prices were very low, and that there was no money. However, this man always had enough money to travel. He liked to travel to Mexico, he likes the ruins. I think that he was
a hippie for a while, so he liked to travel...we worked okay there for a while, for example, when people in other jobs made less money. People in other jobs could make $150.00 a week, and we would make $500 in two weeks. So it was a lot. There were times that, together, we, [Martha and I] made over $1,000 for two weeks of work. Then it was good for the two of us. When he saw that, he decided that his workers were not going to make that much money any more. For example, Maria built a house with her salary in Mexico. It cost her $14,000, and in Mexico $14,000 is a fortune to invest in a house. He used to have an associate, his wife's sister. This woman was...I do not know what happened, but this woman left, and they kept the business. It was at that time when everything started changing. I think this woman lives now in San Francisco. This woman was always fair because we could talk to her about our situation, and she often decided in our favor. Not with this man. Everything started going downhill since she left, since she left the shop.

Q  Do you remember when that happened?

A: Martha: Mario did not meet the lady.
   Mario: Yes, I met her.
   Martha: She had left years before you came.

Q  Do you remember who organized the work stoppage that Monday?

A: Martha: That was the only thing. The people who decided that...they were not capable of enduring a work stoppage. They let their impulses guide them. They would say: "It is today, or never." So that is why Javier said, "we stop on Monday, or I do not participate any more." So all of us agreed. Okay, we stop working on Monday.

Q  This was before you met Alicia and Newman, right?

A: Martha: Look, that was decided when they already had met Alicia and Newman I...

Q  No, before you met Alicia and Newman. Do you remember? I understand that you stopped working on a Monday, on MLK day. And that you went to CRLA to seek help. At CRLA you requested Cristina Briano's [Mrs. Briano was a staff member at CRLA] advice.
A: Martha: Well, that was before the big paron (strike). Look, I do not have any idea. That was decided...we do not know how that happened. It is because new people were hired, and among those new people my comadre came. Angelica, Fina's sister. So at that time, Fina was also hired. Then, people say..."Well, I have heard from my sister, Doña Elena, that her [Angelica] told them: "Lets go, I do the talking." So, she investigated what to do and all that, and she made the appointment with Cristina. And it is when we got together. Then Cristina said that she could not help us but that she would introduce us to Alicia. And it was in that way that we met them. And, they started going out to eat [during lunch break] with us. We would go out to eat our lunch, and they would come and talk to us. That is how we got acquainted with them. But, in reality, I do not know who organized that.

Mario: Look...
Martha: First was Cristina, then el paron.

Mario: I remember that that day, just like that, without consulting anybody, without anything to protect us, we walked out of our jobs. We said: "We want the patron to come out and talk to us." He came, we talked and he did not want to raise our salaries. So we said: "Okay. Then we go home." So we went home. We did not work that day. But, somebody said, I do not remember who said, that what we had done was not okay...because el patron...they called us at our house to go back to work. And, we went back to work the next day. Somebody said that what we did was wrong. That we needed legal help, because doing it just like that, we risked our jobs, we could be fired without any protection.

Martha: But in reality, we were not seeking a union organizer. We were looking for someone to help us to better our salaries. The union's idea came from Alicia, and they brainwashed us about the union. Because we did not have the idea of forming a union.

Mario: What we wanted was to pressure the patron, so that he would agree to raise our salaries. Because, we realized that the company could not function. It takes a long time to train people to learn to make good ornaments.

Q: What tactics were you going to use to pressure the patron to give you what you wanted?

A: Mario: Stop working.

Martha: We just wanted to stop working so that he would raise our salary and, you know, organize ourselves in a better way to force him to
give us lunch breaks because we were not able to even do that. And, they did not push us to take breaks. They let us work through the breaks. It was okay with them. When somebody complained about physical pains, they would just lay that person off. That is how they solved those problems. The health insurance they gave us was bad and we had to pay almost the whole quota. That is what we wanted to remedy.

Mario: We wanted a change in our health insurance, so that we did not have to pay for it. The salaries were going down, and we had to pay more for everything. We had to have health insurance because of the children, my wife, and because it is important to have health insurance in this country.

Q: When you walked out that Monday, you went to see Cristina, and she told you that walking out like that was not okay. You went back to work. When did you met with Newman and Alicia?

A: Mario: We met in an office that is across from Cocos, [Mexican bakery]. There we got together. That was the first time that we got together with Alicia and Newman. Then, they started going to our work to eat lunch with us.

Q: What kind of information did they give you in terms of union organizing?

A: Mario: Well, at the beginning, they told us that we were able to do everything we wanted to do, see? But as the events moved on...

Martha: And that everything was fine. They told us that everything was very easy and that they were going to investigate the patron's business. That everything was just going to be fine! In reality they never told us: "Look, there may be these kinds of problems or complications." They never, never discussed that. For them everything was as the Americano [American] says: "Piece of cake." If things were complicated, they were not able to find solutions to anything, nothing. They were not capable of saying, "Let's do this, or let's do that." What was even worse, every time we had meetings, we always had somebody that would give us the news, and we never knew who did it. It was until after the fact that we knew who did it.

Q: What kind of news, who told what?
A: Martha: For example, we met, and decided on a strategy, let's say a work stoppage, slow the production down, or any other thing. Well, there was a couple that always went to these meetings and was always telling everything to the patron.

Q: Do you know who that couple was? Can you tell me?

A: Martha: Yes, it was Alicia and Uriel Caballero, they were husband and wife. We found out what they were doing very late because after all the compañeros were laid off one by one, like Josefina, whose hands were injured, and Sara too...

Q: Are you discussing the events that happened after the strike? Can we go back to the beginning and discuss how you formed the union?

A: Mario: Well look, this is what happened. When we went to those first meetings at Alicia and Newman's house. At the beginning of those meetings I told them: "You know what? I am leaving the company, I can help in whatever way I can, but I am looking for another job." The truth is that I hated to ask for unemployment at the end of the year because it was at that time...

Martha: Always, every year we stopped working after December 15, and we did not go back until they called us. That was also another way they had to regulate our salary.

Mario: You know, laying you off during the Christmas holidays? It is when you need more money, and it is when we were so broke.

Q: You were forced before Christmas to work very hard to supply all the orders and after that, you were laid off?

A: Mario: Yes, because December 15 was the deadline to supply all the orders all over the country. So I told my compañeros that the money I was making there was not enough to support my family. They said that it was fine for me to leave. We started going to the meetings and getting together to discuss the union. We had a union election, and we won the election.

Q: Based on what you were saying previously, when you voted for the union, were you fully aware of what you were doing?
A: Martha: Look, in reality they never told us. Well, I think that not even they had a notion. I am very sure that they did not have a notion, or experience, about union organizing. And, I am going to tell you why. They made us vote. They told us that everything was easy. And, that the results...when we were parados (on strike) ...If they would have had an idea of what they were doing, they would have told us: "Go collect unemployment." Because, supposedly there is a law...I learned about it later on when I was going to school. Now, after all that time. Since the strike. When you are on strike you have the right to ask for unemployment, disability, and things like that. So if they had any idea of what they were doing, they would have told us: "You know what? Go ask for unemployment and disability." In one way or another the money is going to come from the patron. Because the state would have pushed him in any way to pay us. Well, No! [mocking Newman and Alicia] "You cannot collect unemployment". I had to ask for disability, and the state did not deny it to me. Because it was my right. I wrote on the form that I was on strike, and even though they gave it to me [Martha was pregnant during the strike]. Later on, I read the unemployment papers, and it is possible to collect unemployment. Therefore, they did not have a clue of what they were doing. In other words, they just told us: "Organize yourselves and it is going to be very easy."

Q: Mario, do you think the same way as Martha?

A: Mario: Well look, how can I say it. During the time I was involved, I learned to know people. So, maybe during that time, I did not have experience about unions and those arguendes [deals] like people say. But I think they had some knowledge. After all, they led us to where we were. And everything was going okay because with much sacrifice and bad times with the patron we had control of the situation, because the patron had spent all his energy and money...because it took him approximately three year to open his Maquiladora [Sweat Shop] in Mexico. When the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) started happening, he opened a sweat shop in Mexico. He was doing in Mexico the same ornaments we were doing here. He even brought people from Mexico to train them here, and took people from here to train others there. But the people he brought did not know anything.
Q What happened during the meeting in which you decided to go on strike? Did they [Newman and Alicia] explain to you the pros and cons of a strike? Can you discuss that meeting?

A: Martha: Newman and Alicia thought that everything was going to be solved overnight, the compañeros were thinking in similar ways. That is why when I told you, after two weeks, everybody started looking for a job, there were even people who got good jobs, and they dropped them just to go back to work at Calliope Designs. But not because they did not like the other jobs. But because they thought that things were going to improve much more at Calliope Designs. Like Josefina--she found another job, and Sara, Javier, Rafael, and Consuelo. Everybody sought new jobs. The only ones who stayed behind were us. I could not look for another job, and he [Mario] did not want to abandon them in the strike. So, when we ended the strike, the most affected ones were Mario, Sara, Fina and Paulina.

Q Why?

A: Mario: Well let me explain it to you. I was going to school, and I always knew more...

Martha: Because they were the most aggressive ones, they always pushaban (pushed) the patron. Then, one day, he got mad, and Paulina was arrested.

Q During the strike?

A: Martha: They wanted to arrest Sara, Mario, or Fina--any one of those four. The thing is that Paulina passed near the vieja [security woman]...then when we went back to work, they threw an ornament box on Fina's head. They wanted to kick Mario and Sara out. So they heavy-handed them. First, when they protested about Fina's accident. Mario, Sara, Javier, and Rafael were laid off off for one month without any salary.

Q What did the union do to protect Fina and the others?

A: Martha: Nothing!

Q Why?
A: Martha: That is what we ask ourselves. Mario: There was some kind of legal action about Fina, but I do not know for sure.

Q: What actions did the Union take when you all were laid-off?

A: Mario: Nothing, we were just laid off for one month. A month after we went back to work, they sent us a paper informing us that we had to start working. Since then, they [employers] became heavier-handed with me.

Martha: They started giving the worst ornaments to Sara and Mario. Sara! She was a very good worker and due to the hardship of those ornaments, her hands started getting swollen. That is how she ruined her hands. That is how she started missing work because of her hands. So what happened? When they saw that! They purposely gave her even more of those ornaments, harder ones, just to fire her. They were giving to Mario very bad ornaments, so that he would barely make the minimum salary. Then finally one day, Mario grew tired and left the company. When Mario left, we became aware of who was telling the patron about our meetings and plans.

Q: How did you find out?

A: Martha: Because one day they started taking Lupe to Mexico to make masa [dough]. They also took Juan to do the finishing. But Juan did not tell us about his activities! [Lupe was the only Mexican in the company who was anti-union. She stayed working for the company throughout the strike. She also trained new "scabs". People think that because she stayed and did the important part of the production--dough making and training--the company survived for 13 weeks without the others' labor. Juan was a very active union member. He participated in several union activities and was always at the picket-line. That is probably why his coworkers were very surprised to see him cooperating with the company owner]. He never told us that he was going to Tijuana to work and train people. One day the patron called Manuel to his office and asked him to train people in Tijuana, he was told that they would pay whatever money he wanted. Manuel behaved correctly. He told them several excuses so that he definitely could not take that trip. It was not the salary, it was [his principles]. He immediately told us about it. When Alicia Caballero heard about it, she left what she was doing and immediately talked to the
patron and told him that she would be more than willing to go. Then she was told that Lupe was not going on that trip. Uriel, [Alicia's husband] said that he would want to go. And he went with the patron. Later on, Alicia and Lupe went together. So they continued going with Lupe and el patron back and forth. They [Alicia and Uriel] are the most backward people. We all ignore them.

Q What did you do when you became aware of all this. Did you talk to Alicia and Newman?

Q Martha: Yes, they knew, they always knew. However, if they were thinking of really hurting us [meaning Alicia and Newman]. Well they did hurt some people. Like Doña Elena because she was older. She could have stayed there until her retirement and some other people like Consuelo, who does not like to go to school and does not like to better herself.

Mario: They really hurt them.

Martha: They really hurt them. But us, and the others--they did us a favor. We were pushed to go out and look for better jobs, with better salaries and benefits. We get raises often times. As an example, the person who really has helped us the best, more so than Alicia and all the others has been Paulina Martinez. She saw in the paper that the place where her husband works was needing new people, and she told Mario about it. She also asked her husband to recommend Mario for the position. Later on, she talked to her supervisor about me and asked her to hire me. Paulina's supervisor requested me to talk and write some English. So, thanks to God, it has been good for me. And, it is the same for Mario. We have dental, eye and health insurance, and we do not have to pay that much money, and our salaries are even higher. I am making a third more than what I was making there, and Mario also makes a third more.

Mario: Look, I worked there several years, and I only made $5.00 an hour when I worked by the hour. But...in reality...that helped me...

Martha: And, I say, now we know what it really means to receive bonuses that come from the patron's pocket, not from your salary. So that they tell you: "These are your bonuses, your Christmas money, and this is your salary. This is how much money we are giving you a year."

Q How did you view the negotiations when you were on strike? I understand that you Mario were part of the negotiations committee. Who was negotiating with the Patrones in addition to Newman and Alicia. Do you think they were representing you fairly?
A: Mario: I was the picket line captain. I sat at the negotiation table. In reality, we were the ones negotiating, and Newman and Alicia would translate what we were saying. I do not know if they had the experience or not. I think that they must since they were doing it. Later on, I learned that Alicia was an organizer at her university.

Martha: [talking to Mario] But you know very well that it is not the same to organize a protest as to organize a union. Because for example, for us to say, "you know what Laura? There is something happening here in the neighborhood, and we are organizing ourselves to protest about this or that, or to protest against the aggression against our Raza [people]." But it is very different to organize a protest and to organize a union because when you organize a union, the union has to have a base and a fund to protect everybody. The union has to be strong enough to defend the workers against the patrones. The union has to have a fund to help workers economically that have been fired unjustly. The union has to push the employers to hire the workers back, so that the workers get to be hired again. If the worker is not hired back by the company, the union has to help the worker financially.

Q Did you have the time to make a financial fund?

A: Martha: No. No.

Mario: Let me tell you something. Our salaries were not enough to make a union fund. You see, for us to pay the quotas to increment the fund was very difficult.

Q But if you did not have a fund, why did you decide to go on strike?

A: Mario: Because we were desperate. We did not care if we were fired or not. We would rather work in the fields where we would be paid $5.00. They would pay you the same and with better treatment. There, in the fields, it was better. At Calliope Designs, one, you had to be breathing the flour because it was all in the air. The dough was right there. They even mixed it there. The flour was all over the air. You had to be swallowing salt all day long. You work happier in the fields, in the open air, happy, relaxed.

Martha: This happened. How can I tell you? To make an analogy, when you live in Mexico, you see the people come back and forth from the United States to Mexico, and you think it is easy. I can also do it. But life,
it is not like that. When you come to this country you are faced with the fact that they do not even talk your same language. This is how it happened with the union. When we were all involved, the union was not ready to handle the problems or golpes [hits] that we had.

Q: Some of you were also thinking that you were going to be on strike for only few days. Is that right?

A: Martha: All the people from Guanajuato were thinking that they were going to be on strike for only very few days. And, when they saw that it was not a few days, they looked for another job, and they left. They just dropped the struggle.

Q: Who were the people from Guanajuato?

A: Martha: Rafael was one of them. Javier looked for a job and left. Josefina got disability immediately and left. The disability insurance gave her some training and she left. They quitearon [quit] immediately. They left, and only the ones who stayed had to cover for all.

Mario: Well, you know, the only consolation I have is that I did not give them [meaning the employer] the enjoyment to fire me. I went and told Stephanie, "My salary is not enough." And she told me: "look, think about all the time we have spent together," etc. etc. I told her, I need to have a raise. Are you going to give it to me..."

Q: What happened to the other people, like Doña Elena? According to some, she was the most affected one. Did she stay to the end, when the factory moved down to Mexico?

A: Martha: Elena stayed to the end. When they closed the factory, I was only working part time, two days a week. That was all.

Q: Who else was working?

A: Martha: Blanca, Consuelo Arellano, Alicia and Uriel Caballero, Manuel, Doña Elena and myself. They also did not tell us about closing. We just got to work on a Monday, and they gave us recommendation letters and our checks.

Mario: Look, we had an idea that they were going to close...
Martha: Yes we did, but they did not tell us when or how they were going to close.

Q Did you contact the union to inform them of what was happening?

A: Martha: You know that Alicia and Newman were already separated. Alicia was working some place else. So she did not have any interest in the union because the fish [PSGF], that was another place that they organized, had closed the plant. She was already looking for another place to make money. Newman had already left. We did not have any contact with him.

Q How about the legal services the union provided for you?

A: Martha: Neil Herring was a good lawyer, a good person, a person that when we needed him he supported us. Such as with Paulina's case. Thanks to him, her case was won. Paulina received her retroactive pay. I think that he supported us tremendously. He was always very honest with us. He told us, "I will help you all I can. I am a retired lawyer, I do not practice law right now, I only do special jobs." So, we were lucky to have him. He was a good person. That is all.
Martha and Mario Jimenez, workers,
Calliope Designs

Q: Fina, could you tell me were you come from?
A: I come from the state of Michoacan, Mexico.

Q: How long have you been living in California?
A: I came in 1960; I was only 18 years old.

Q: When did you start working at Calliope Designs?
A: I started working at the monitos [ornaments --Calliope Designs] in 1985. My sister Angelica, helped me get a job in the shipping department. My starting wage was $3.75 an hour. [I was hired] because I spoke English. I could speak and read English [but] I did not know how to write [it]. However, not knowing how to write English was not a problem, I needed to read English at work not to write.

I worked in the back of the company, but I could go back and forth to the area were the other employees worked. I worked in the back of the company with my supervisor and my companeras [coworkers]. All of the people in the shipping department were white; there were no Mexicanos [Mexicans].

Q: How was the racial breakdown in the production area?
A: At the front [in the production area] were the ones who categorize the ornaments [by type and style], and often I had to pick the ornaments, of course, after they were maqueados (lacquered). All the supplies needed in the shipping department were stored in the front. Boxes, papers, etc. After I finished an order, I would take the completed invoices to the office. I usually saw the other workers and we talked about the working conditions. The racial breakdown was as [follows]: There were two American Indian women, Anglos were the supervisors, and the rest were all Mexicans. All of the people who did production were Mexicans.

I never had any problems with them [company owners] because when I started working there I was making monitos. But because of my doctor's orders I was assigned to the shipping department. Nevertheless, I did not work as hard in the shipping department, as I did in
It was better for me to make monitos because I was paid piece rate. But I could not continue [making monitos] because of the salt that was in the dough. I also got the habit of finishing my monitos with my tongue. I would lick them to give them the finishing touch. I used to go to my house with my tongue all weary.

Even though I [was transferred] to the shipping department, I continued having a friendship with the workers in production. All of a sudden, the problems started with the employer. He would say to the workers: 'We are going to reduce [the pay by] .10 cents because all the prices have gone high --salt, flour, everything. We are going to reduce .10 cents on some ornaments.'

Q: Do you remember when these changes started happening?
A: Yes, it was at the beginning of 1985. In one year they reduced the ornaments' pay by .10 cents. Then six months later, they told us that the building rent had gone up and they reduced .05 on two other ornaments. These changes in wages really did not affect me because my wage was the same; I was [paid by the hour]. But the other people working under the piece rate wage were very affected. So they would complain a lot during our lunch breaks, and we would discuss about ways and places where they could get help. I told them that the only place that could help them was California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA).

That was at the beginning of 1988. See, three years had gone by since the patron [company owner] started reducing their wages. Finally I told them that they had to go and ask for help to remedy their working conditions. My sister Angelica, Consuelo --la Prieta [dark one]-- and Sara went to CRLA. I think that was it. I am not sure if Martha, Mario's wife went with them. We all agreed that they would go with Angelica. Dona [term of respect for mature people] Elena, the senior worker, did not want to be involved. Two months after the struggle started, Dona Elena was still not participating. I was worried about her because she was getting sicker and sicker and I would tell Her, 'Dona Elena all these things that they are doing to you [are not okay]. You are the one who has been working the longest, your hands are getting tired, and they [company owners] keep cutting your wages. What is going to happen to you when you cannot make any more ornaments? You have to defend yourself.' I encouraged her to participate.

Q: How was the treatment you received from the patrones?
A: The woman [wife] was not bad, but the man! He was rude and arrogant. The woman was nicer, but he was bad! There were times in which he came to work in a bad mood, and he would kick boxes and things. But to tell you the truth, he never offended me. He offended me when we were on strike. Then he offended me because he thought that I was [using] information from his business to help us in the strike. I thought that we would use that information to tell his customers about his labor malpractices. Because we were sending letters to his customers informing them about the strike, we wanted to boycott his business. The patron thought that I was the only one who had [access] to that information. However, I only took part on taking copies of the invoices, there were others doing it too. Once [during the strike] he saw in Juan car's trunk a box full of envelopes with the name and addresses of his buyers. At that time that he became very abusive, he was swearing at me and started pushing me to have a better view of the box, [because I was standing next to the car]. I had a picket line sign with me, and I tried immediately to cover the trunk with my sign. He even wanted to open the trunk by force, and I told him that he did not have any right to do that. He said [to me] that he wanted to see what was inside the trunk. I told him you have to ask the car owner, and he said this is my property, all of this is my property. I said, no, your property is the shop, it is true that this is the parking lot, but you have to still ask the car owner. From that time on, he never talked to me again. But I did not care.

Q: Let's go back to the time when you were doing your first organizing. When Sara, Consuelo and Angelica decided to go to CRLA to ask for help, what happened?

A: First, I think they talked to Christina Briano, then Christina spoke with Newman [Strawbridge], because Alicia [Sanchez] was not involved yet.

Q: Was it then that you decided to stop working for one day? How did you arrive at the conclusion to stop working? Was this before you went to CRLA, or after?

A: We all talked. We always talked about our working problems during our lunch break because we ate outside the shop. When we were eating, the other workers would tell me their problems and what was
happening to them. I clearly told them that what was happening to them was not okay. If everyone on an hourly wage basis got raises, the people working under piece rate should not have to take a wage cut. Why did the *patrones* not cut everybody's wage to be even? I told them, 'it is not fair because the legal thing is that if they are spending much money in the items they buy, they should reduce everybody's wages.'

The day when we all decided not to work, nobody went to work. We decided it was time to do something radical so that the *patron* would reconsider his idea of cutting our wages. We hoped for him to respond positively, and if he did not [respond positively], then we were ready to continue the struggle. But the decision was made by everybody. Sara Ochoa had the idea to leave work that day; I think it was her. Angelica and Sara were the most active ones. However, they never stop asking me for my advice, because they probably thought that I had more knowledge about the law, or [simply], because I spoke English, I knew more. When we decided [to stop working], when they asked my opinion, I told that I agreed to stop working one day. I told them that they should do it because if there was not action, we could not find solutions to anything. We had exhausted the talks with the *patron*. We had had meetings with him. Precisely, we just had had a meeting with him that weekend, and we had explained to him our situation. We had asked for a professional translator. I spoke to the *patrona* [woman employer] and requested a professional translator because the large majority of the people did not speak English. [They did not bring a translator to the meeting], so what did they gain to talk to us in English? Nothing, because nobody understood what the *patrones* were saying. As I told you, I told them to hire a bilingual person for the workers who did not speak English. The *patrones* said 'yes,' that they were going to have somebody for the next meeting. The next meeting came, we did not have a translator, and our demands were not taking into account.

Q: How about Lupe Farias? Did she speak English?

A: Lupe spoke very good English, but she said the opposite of what the workers wanted for her to say; she was always on the *patron's* side. She is a bad person! even though she is Mexican, she is bad! She treated the other Mexican workers bad. We did not have her support. That is why we had a hard time during the strike because she kept working for
the patron, she did not go on strike with us. In addition, she looked for people to work. She brought other Mexicans to work!

Q: Going back to the meeting where you were to have a translator, what happened at that meeting?

A: The meeting came, and the patrones did not have anybody to translate for us. Then, we stopped working the following Monday.

Q: Why did you choose that Martin Luther King (MLK) Monday?
A: It was an action that we had decided [to take] in case our demandas were not met. We did not plan our sit-down at work around MLK because it was a special day. Our Monday sit-down was a mere coincidence with MLK day. We got together early that morning outside the shop. We got together and, after we went in the shop, --all of us at once, did not work. We did not work because we wanted to wait for the patron to meet with us. After the sit-down, we talked to Newman or Christina Briano, I do not remember. I think it was only Christina. Christina advised us to go back to work the next day [because we could lose our jobs]. She also told us that a sit-down was not the best way to deal with labor problems. Therefore, we decided to go back to work the next day.

Q: What happened when you went back to work the next day?
A: The next day, I was kept from going inside the shop because somebody accused me of being the sit-down organizer. I think Lupe accused me. She said to the patron that I was the organizer. But let me tell you something. It was not the one who started all that organizing, but I was the one who never let the union die because I gave them the energy to keep struggling. Maybe people believed in me, I do not know. I told Lupe once, 'Lupe: Right now you are good friends with the patron, you obey him on everything, but you are going to lose your job [some day], he is going to kick you out.' When the shop was moved down to Mexico, he fired her.

Q: How was the working environment on Tuesday, the day after, when you went back to work?
A: Since I was in the back, I did not see what happened. I found out what was happening at lunch break when we went out. They told me that the *patron* had Lupe translating for him at their meeting, and he asked them why they did not want to work the day before. He said that he could have fired them. I do not remember if it was Mario or la *Prieta* who told him that if that was his choice, it was fine with them. The *patron* begged them in that meeting to wait for a solution, that everything was going to be okay.

Q: Nobody spoke English? Not even Mario or Angelica?

A: No. Only Lupe and myself. Everybody understood some English, but not sufficiently to talk to the *patron*. Even though workers could not speak English, they could understand some and that is how they knew Lupe was saying lies to them. I was not present at that meeting because I worked in a different department, so the meeting was with the other workers.

However, after the sit-down, Jones, my supervisor, was forced by the *patron* to give me a hard time, to push me to quit. She [confidentially] told me that it was in my best interest if I avoid going to the front and talking to the other workers. She asked me to understand her difficult situation. She said that she did not want to hurt me. Those were hard days. I even remember clearly that after the strike we went back to work, and I only worked a few days because the stress made me sick.

Q: What was your next action after the *patron* talked to your coworkers?

A: We decided not to take any actions without seeking proper assistance. Because we became aware of the [potential for] losing our jobs if we did more crazy things. It was then when Newman talked to us. I saw Newman the next week when he and Alicia came to visit us. We discussed with them what to do, what kinds of problems we had, and why we wanted changes in the workplace.

Q: What did you want? What were you demanding from the *patron*?
A: As I told you, I was not affected by the problems. But people wanted for the injustices at the workplace to stop. Not to cut their wage, because two years before they had lowered the workers' ornament's pay. One year after, the reduction was doubled. And it was not only one ornament, but two or three. They [the workers] wanted for things to be equal because the most affected workers were those working piece rate. [They wanted] the patron to stop cutting their wages. This was a company [in which] everyone was part of production. Why hurt those making the ornaments? I think that the bosses grew scared of the workers making to much money because they could work very fast, [therefore, they could make more money than others working hourly wage]. However, when they [the patrones] needed the orders, they wanted the workers to [work faster] so that the patrones could supply the orders immediately, and without having to pay [to workers] what was right for them. We also wanted to have paid holidays. We wanted for the patron to cover the health insurance benefits because we were paying seventy-five percent. We wanted to have health insurance three months after we started working there, and not six months after. We also wanted vacation and fair treatment. We wanted to be treated equal to white workers. There was a supervisor who mistreated workers very badly. She would return to the workers their ornaments to make them again, regardless if the ornaments were defective or not. That was time and money lost for the workers; it was not fair. I am sure she was hired to make the [workers'] life difficult because she was hired after we started our organizing efforts. So that was not convenient to the patron. Even my supervisor was fired. She was fired after the strike.

Q: Going back to your meetings with Alicia and Newman. Can you tell me how your union was organized?

A: They [Newman and Alicia] gave us lengthy information of what we should do to organize the union [what steps we should take]. We had elections, etc. Alicia and Newman told us what benefits we could [obtain] if we win the union. The patrones told us that, if they wanted, they could close the company. [Despite all obstacles], we decided to continue the organizing efforts. The patrones told us that if we organized a union, it was going to be bad business for the company -- that they were going to lose profits. And as a result, they were going to be forced to
close or move the company. They [the *patrones*] threatened us, and despite all of that, we continued our organizing efforts.

Q: Did you have in mind that you wanted to organize a union and ultimately a strike?

A: That was very important. Before we met Alicia and Newman, --when we talked to them-- we had in our minds that we wanted to organize a union.

Q: Then Alicia and Newman helped you only to channel your organizing actions?

A: Yes. They told us what could happen [to us] during our organizing efforts. They explained everything to us. We did not go to those meetings all ignorant because we knew exactly what we wanted. That is why all voted to form a union. After we won the union elections we started having legal meetings [contract negotiations] with the *patron*. 

Q: During our last interview you discussed the negotiations with the *patron* (Company Owner or supervisor). For how long did you negotiate with him before the strike?

A: I think approximately six months, maybe more. Because we met with him once a month. The union representatives, Newman and Alicia were also present in these meetings. However, we always end up getting nowhere. They always said that they would have a response the following meeting. So the following meeting would either be cancelled or they would not agree with our petitions, so we went on for a long time, before we approved the strike.

Q: How did you arrive at the decision of going on strike?

A: Because we had exhausted all avenues for a peaceful arrangement. Everything we asked for was denied. So that it is how we decided to go on strike. We had a meeting, we had a secret vote, and everybody vote in favor of going on strike. I think we had 21 or 22 members.

Q: Fina, I understand that the company had a great demand of ornaments before the Christmas season. Did you consider that fact in your strike decision so that it would affect economically the *patron* even more?

A: I do not remember well. I think it was in July because it was very hot. We stayed on strike for 13 weeks. I had never been involved in strikes.

Q: When you went on strike, were you aware of the consequences or benefits of a strike?

A: Look, we had an idea of what to expect because Newman and Alicia told us about it. But it is never the same to be told as to experience it because to live a strike experience was very difficult.
Q: How so?

A: Well, the first and most important aspect, at least for me, was the division among Mexican workers, our own Raza (Race). They treated us bad. To me that was the hardest to live with; there were those who supported the strike, and the ones who were anti-union. I felt horrible to see Mexicans going in to work for the patron while we were on strike. The second aspect was the fact that we had to be on the picket line everyday. That was a different experience from what I had lived. We had to be on the picket line outside the shop with our signs. From that time on, I understood why we were on strike. Before, I could never understand why people were on the picket line. After that, I always support workers who are on picket lines. Now that I see them, I feel like getting out of my car and walking with them. The third aspect was the financial burden. I had my husband's salary to count on. But, there were many couples working at Calliope Designs, and they did not have any money. Thank God, we were able to cover our expenses with my husband's salary.

Q: Since you did not have a union fund, what did you do to collect money?

A: We did many things, we even made cheese to sell it among friends. I even went to the flea-market in Napa with cans to ask people for donations. That means we were boteando [people put money in sealed cans that are taken to the union hall to be added to the general fund]. We also went to different businesses, like Food 4 Less and Lucky stores. At the beginning people looked at us weird, but later on we got used to it. We went to churches and, to different organizations. Stores gave us food.

Q: How did you feel when you were asking for food and money?

A: I felt very humiliated; I felt bad. But I got used to it. The strike was very difficult for me. I did not have any support here in my house. My husband was very anti-union. He would come home very moody and screamed at me for no reason. He would say that, instead of doing all those union things, I should stay home and clean. I was killing myself because wherever I was, I always came
home to cook and clean the house before he came. But he always found an excuse to fight. He argued that he had union experience and that the union was for lazy people who did not want to work. That is why he did not like me being involved. To tell you the truth, I never believed him because, if that was the case, why was he so awful about the union? I did not agree with his ideas, because I worked harder during the strike than any other time. After my daily things, I worked at night to help with the expenses. In this way I could be free to be on the picket line in the morning, although I only worked six weeks before the strike ended. During the strike, other people worked; *Prieta*, --dark one-- (Consuelo) Paulina, Mario, Rafael, Juan, Javier, and Josefina.

Q  How were the daily activities on the picket line? Did you have support from the community?

A: Let me tell you. On one hand the strike was difficult. On the other, for me it was nice. I felt more united to my people. I saw them as my family. I truly understood it when I got very sick three days after we went back to work, and they supported me. The community supported us tremendously. Many people came from different places and organizations such as unions. They brought us sodas, food, etc., --a wonderful support.

Q  How did you feel when you saw the scabs going to work in your place?

A: We felt bad. We screamed at them. We told them things that would hurt them. I had never been in anything like that, but I learned to scream. I was very angry because we were struggling to improve the working conditions, and it was awful to see Latinas working there.

Q  What did you do when the patron hired more people, and the guards to work?

A: We saw him as our enemy. He told us things. He told us we were crazy, etc. That made us even more angry. Maybe in his mind we were not that, but he was afraid of us. He was trying to hide his fear.
Q: Do you think that your strike affected him financially?

A: Yes of course. His sales went down. He had cancellations because he did not supply on time. I got to see many cancellations from big stores.

Q: Do you think that, if Lupe would have supported you in the strike, you would have gone back to work in two weeks as you expected originally?

A: Lupe made the dough and was a key person in production. Nobody else knew how to make dough. If she would have gone on strike, the patron would have had nobody to do the dough.

Q: Who trained the new workers?

A: The new people made easy ornaments because the supervisor hardly knew how to make some. Lupe was teaching them. However, she also had a difficult time making them. When she started working there, she was trained to make ornaments. But because she made ugly ones, she was changed to dough making. An American Indian woman could only make some, but not the nice ones like Dona Elena or Sara. The American Indian woman never supported us. The married couple was a difficult ornament, and only Sara and Dona Elena could do it. When I went back to work, I received many returned orders. They were terribly made.

The new people made the bears, snowman--easy things--magnets, deer. We made all kinds of ornaments. The patron had customers all over the country, even in Canada. He went to many craft fairs and sold a lot.

Q: Do you remember how many times you sat to negotiate with the patron during the strike? Did you see any improvements in your relationship with him?

A: I was part of the negotiating team. We met approximately 15 times, in 13 weeks, so we were talking once a week. I tell you, I had never seen such a hard head as that man had. And also the woman. He was the one who did all the talking, of course through his lawyer because he always brought his lawyer. I think later on
he finally recognized us as a union, when he started being more afraid of us. This happened when we started sending letters to his costumers informing them about his labor malpractices. See, despite us being so ignorant, we figured out what to do. We waited for them to close and searched in the garbage cans for the envelopes. I knew about them throwing the used mail in the garbage. Juan also knew because he picked the garbage. Before the strike, I started keeping a log of the patron's costumers and I had that log in my possession. We also had our goals. Once the patron saw the mailing in somebody's trunk. After that time he changed.

Q: Can you discuss what you won and what you lost when you went back to work?

A: We won paid holidays and salary--no more cuts in the ornament's pay--and health benefits. We did not win any sick days, nor union security. About work, the payment for the ornaments was not raised, but it was not going to be reduced. That was a victory because that was the beginning of our organizing. The so-called bonuses were also taken away because they would take .05 cents from each ornament a worker made, and at the end of the year they gave that money to the workers as a bonus. That was not a bonus. That was worker's money.

Q: You also went back to work without a union contract?

A: Yes, we did not have a contract. But, we continued negotiating.

Q: How did you feel when you went back to work? Proud, happy or like you failed? How was it for the workers to be sitting side by side working with the scabs?

A: On one side, we were happy because we won. We defeated the patron, and we had shown to him that we were not as stupid as he thought. On the other side we felt like being in war --the scabs and us. Since we did not win union security, the scabs were not forced to join the union. We had struggle so much to arrive at that
agreement, and they enjoyed the benefits of our struggle without fighting for it. They were even in a privileged position because they received better treatment than us.

Q. How many scabs stayed working?

A: All of them. There were about 15.

Q. How was your relationship with Lupe? It is my understanding that the union organize a rally in front of her house?

A: We even went to talk to her husband. Her husband got very mad because we went to her house in the mornings to protest. He stopped talking to us. We used to have a friendship because he is my cousin. I never talked to him after that. Lupe continued being our enemy. She was rude to us.

For me, the stress was so high. My supervisor had resigned her position. When I went back to work I had a new supervisor. He was a man, and he did not know his job. Since he did not know the shipping operations, I had to do his and my job. However, he was always returning my work. We always ended up in the supervisor's office because we could not agree. So Sally told him the orders were okay. He even gave me a hard time in regards to when and how I should take my lunch break. He prohibited me from taking my lunch at the same time as the others did. The goal was to break us apart—to demoralize us. I protested, and their excuse was that everything was new and different from before the strike. I took my lunch alone. The scabs took their lunch at another time, and the union members at another. We were never together. I received the harder treatment because the patron was sure that I was the union organizer. A few days after I went back to work I got sick. And the patron did not let me make a doctor's appointment during working hours. I had to leave against his will. The next day, I had a heart attack. I was out of work for six months. When I went back to work, I had an accident three days later. The supervisor and I were supplying orders. I needed one box from the higher shelves. There were three boxes piled together. I needed the box in the middle. Listen to this. Anyone could reason about what to do. He had to move the upper box someplace else in order to give me the box that was in the middle. Well, he just pulled the box in the
middle—I even told him, "Do not do that." He was on top of the ladder, and I was down. "Move one first and then the other." I said. He just pulled the box in the middle, and the box that was on top fell on my head. I had no room to move to. There was only space for the ladder and myself. The box weighed 40 pounds. So when it landed on me, I fell with my legs wide open. He could only say, "I am sorry." I was very angry. What he did was a criminal act. I got up very scared and upset. He was fully aware that I could not have any accidents in which I bled because I could bleed to death. When I went back to work he and the patron read the doctor’s instructions. I do have a hard time believing it was an accident. I left the room crying and was taken to the office. My compañeros were very upset and almost killed him. I was taken to the hospital, and he was removed from his job immediately. I did not have any broken bones, but my neck and waist hurt a lot. I did not go back to work. A week after, I had another stroke. I was hospitalized for a week. The union did a formal action against the company. I personally hired a lawyer to help me. The company’s insurance had to pay for my doctor and hospital’s bills. The supervisor was moved to New Mexico. After, all the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) said that there was nothing to do because the supervisor was new and had no experience. "To remove a box?" I still think that he tried to kill me. I came to this conclusion by the way he behaved towards me and his way to work. He knew that in case of an accident, I would be hurt. To me, what he did was criminal. I think he was following the patron’s orders, he did not do it on his own. The patron manipulated him, he paid him to hurt me because he was a very ignorant supervisor. The patron paid him to hurt me because he knew that I was the only one that people followed. I believed this even more after I visited a cousin in Salinas. She told me that her brother in law was a union organizer in the lettuce, and the bosses let boxes fall on him, purposely. He was killed. At that time, I thanked God for not being killed. When I got discharged from the hospital, I did not go back to work, because I was severely hurt in my waist. I could not be sitting or standing up. It was painful. I also had to wear a neck bracelet. I still wear it sometimes because I never recuperated fully physically. Two vertebrae were dislocated from the box’s impact. I received disability, and we went to court. They gave me $10,000.00.
Q: What happened with the other workers? Did you keep in contact with them?

A: I went to their meetings and to visit them during their lunch breaks. They continued working, but they were very unhappy. Finally, one day, they told me that the patron informed them that he was moving his company down to Mexico. Alicia and Uriel Caballero were collaborating with the patron in terms of training workers in Tijuana. I told them that it was anti-union to do that. They trained people in Tijuana anyway. Lupe also did trained people there. But, it was not surprising about Lupe. She had always been anti-union. But Uriel and Alicia? I was mad. I told them that when the patron finished using them he was going to kick them out. And, it was true. A month after, the patron closed the company and kicked them out. The only one who continued working was Juan. They needed to bring the ornaments back to finish them. So, Juan did it. Well, that is all I want to say.
Paulina Martinez, worker,
Calliope Designs

Q  Paulina, where did you come from?
A:  I am from Actopan, Hidalgo, Mexico.

Q  How long have you been in the United States?
A:  Seventeen years.

Q  Had you worked in Mexico before you came to the United States?
A:  Yes, I had a few jobs before I came. First, I worked for a lawyer during the day and at night I went to school to obtain a certificate in business. Then, I worked as a secretary in an auto parts store. I also worked at the Municipal Court as a secretary. Right before I came to the United States, I was to start working as a teacher in an elementary school.

Q  Did you have any union organizing experience in any of these jobs?
A:  None.

Q  When did you start working at Calliope Designs?
A:  I started working at Calliope Designs in 1980. I do not remember the month, I think it was February or March.

Q  What job did you have at the beginning?
A:  Production.

Q  How were the working conditions when you started working at Calliope Designs? How were the workers treated? Did you work for piece rate?
A: To tell you the truth, for me the working conditions I experienced here in comparison to Mexico were very different. I did not feel good because first of all, we were paid by piece rate, and I was not used to it. For me, it was a hard job to have to work minute by minute. If we lost a minute, we thought it was lost money. And it was hard for me. In relation to, the working conditions, at that time, when I did not have any experience working here [the United States] they were good.

Q: Did you ever compare your wages with other workers' wages, for example, to the cannery workers? Did you think that the working conditions and the wages were better or worse?

A: The wages were fine because, if we worked more, we made more money. I would heard that in other places people earned the minimum wage or a little bit more.

Q: How much money did you make a week during that time?

A: I do not remember how much money I was making at that time. Maybe $ 500 every two weeks.

Q: Do you remember in what year the patron (owner) started reducing the piece rate wage in the ornaments?

A: It was two years before we started organizing. It was like around 1986.'

Q: How did he let you know about it?

A: He never told us anything. We found out about it by coincidence. I do not remember him telling us about his plans to cut our wages. We found out when we started making the same ornament after he cut the prices.

Q: How did you learn about it then?

A: We were paid differently for each ornament. The supervisors would tell us to make certain ornaments, and we asked them how
much they were going to pay. After they told us, we realized that they had cut our wages.

Q: What did you do when these things happened?

A: Well, I left the company because I was pregnant. I left around November of 1987, and I went back when all of them (meaning the workers) had already stopped working one day and were organizing the union.

Q: So, you were not working when they stopped working that Monday, January 1988?

A: No. I was not there. I went back to work in February. What happened is that Alicia and some workers came to talk to me. I do not remember who came.

Q: What did they tell you when they came to your house?

A: Well, they told me that they had stop working one day, and they were organizing a union, and asked me if I wanted to unite myself to them. So I said "yes."

Q: What motivated you to participate with them in the union?

A: The amount of money they were getting paid for the piece rate. The wages were going down. The more we worked, the less we made. Also the working conditions--At that time I realized how bad they were.

Q: In what ways?

A: In the first place: We did not have air conditioning, we did not have--we were all crowded on one table. We did not have the sufficient space to work. And also because while we were working--Look, while we were working, all the food was right there next to us.

Q: Did you have lockers?
A: No, we did not have lockers. We did not have a special place to eat.

Q: Where did you eat then?

A: Right there, working and eating.

Q: In terms of benefits, did the patron pay you health benefits?

A: Yes, he paid some type of health insurance

Q: I understand that he paid only a percentage, and you paid the rest?

A: I am not sure about that. I never paid any attention to that because I had health insurance through my husband. I received benefits from my husband and from my work.

Q: Did you have paid vacation, sick days, and paid holidays?

A: We received some vacation days, but I do not remember if we got paid. Some holidays, and we did not receive sick days.

Q: How was the patron towards the workers? How was his treatment of you?

A: The patron was nice; he treated us decently. He never said bad things to us, and he conversed with us. The patron was indifferent. The supervisors were good at the beginning. Well, at least for me.

Q: How was the ethnic breakdown in the company? Who did production? Who were the supervisors, etc.?

A: Well, ninety percent of the production workers were Mexicans. The other ten percent were: one American Indian, and some white people--one or two. The American Indian woman worked there for a long time; white people did not last more than a year.
Q: What was the racial background of the supervisors?

A: They were all white.

Q: Did you ever question why a supervisor's position was never offered to any of you?

A: I think one of the reasons some workers were never offered a supervisor's position was because they did not speak English. So even if they became supervisors, they could have only been able to communicate with the workers, but not with the patrones. I think the obstacle was the English.

Q: How did you decide to organize yourselves into a union and, furthermore, a strike?

A: Well for us the decision to go on strike was a hard one because some agreed and some did not. I think that the majority of the workers had no idea what a strike is all about. We did not know what a strike was. It seemed so easy to us, and many were, well, they wanted to have a strike immediately, and some others felt that we should wait.

Q: Who were the ones who did not want to go on strike immediately?

A: For example, those who had been working the longest like Doña Elena [Doña is a meaning of respect for mature women]. Some others were more indifferent.

Q: Did you feel fully prepared for the strike? Were you aware of the benefits and consequences of a strike?

A: I think we were fully informed about a strike. What I think happened--and we did not realize about this until after the strike--was that we did not choose the right time to go on strike.

Q: When would have been the right time to go on strike?
A: The time when they had much more work, which is during the months of September and October. We started the strike, I think in August [The strike started on July 14, 1988]. By August and September, people were already tired because they were not getting paid, they did not have money and all of that. That is why they decided to go back to work. When they decided to go back to work, it was exactly when there was much more work there.

Q: When you discussed in your meetings the tactics of a strike, did Alicia and Newman [Strawbridge] suggested to you when the best time might be to go on strike. Did they explain to you the economic effects of a strike at the time of high production?

A: Well many workers were becoming upset because they wanted to have a strike. That is why we voted to see if we wanted to go on strike or not. Something like that—I do not remember very well. That is how we decided to go on strike at least a month in advance of when we should have done it.

Q: How about you? Did you want to go on strike?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Can you tell me what happened when you were on strike? Were you part of the negotiating committee?

A: No, I was not.

Q: Can you tell me what were you personal experiences during the strike?

A: Well, economically, a little bad. I do not complain a lot because my husband was working at that time and that helped me. It was bad for the workers when both of them worked there. Morale-wise, it was bad. [--silence-- She cried harder]

Q: It still hurts you, right? [Paulina Martinez was the worker who was taken to jail because the owner accused her of hitting the woman guard with her picket-line sign. Paulina was afraid to tell
her husband, and she had people talking to him. She and her husband never discussed the problem ever again).

A: It is because I never had an experience like that. For me it has been the most terrible thing that happened in my life. Because, after all this time, when I decide to do or say something, it brings back those memories.

Q: So, every time you hear the word "union," it brings you pain?

A: Yes, it is painful because I think that I was the one who paid the highest price in the strike. Some others did not suffer, but it [the strike] harmed me the most.

Q: You were the most affected one?

A: And everything for what? To try to help the others, because some of the other workers were backing-out. Some others were already working elsewhere. Josefina was already working, and some others were working too. I saw that some people were backing-out. Someone had to continue the struggle because if one was to back-out--Like for example, if Sara would have backed-out, who was going to continue in the struggle?

Q: Who were continuing in the struggle?

A: Myself, Sara, Mario, sometimes Maria Garcia, Doña Elena and Consuelo? Well they came. Rafael, well, as I told they came but not always. Juan was there.

Q: How was the incident--I know it is going to hurt you to talk about this, Paulina. But, unfortunately, we need to discuss it because it was the most important incident that happened during the strike. And at the same time, the most unjust one. Can you discuss the incident in which you were accused of hitting the woman guard?

A: Well, I did not know exactly how it happened. All I know is that we were standing up outside so that we would see the guards who were in and out looking at us in a suspicious way. We did not
even know why they were doing that. All of the sudden, the police arrived and that was it. They said, I had hit the woman guard with my picket line sign. I said; "No, I did not hit her." They said; "Yes, you hit her." What could I do?

Q Who was there with you besides the strikers?

A: Only the workers, Maria Garcia and myself. They detained me and took me over there [Jail]. What hurt me the most was that they took me with handcuffs through the building. Inside, one of the supervisors--Susana, saw me, laughed, and turned around.

Q How was that for you?

A: For me, at that moment, I was very humiliated because I was a hundred percent sure that I had not done anything. Since they [the employers] saw that I was the one who spent more time there. They needed to find ways to push me away. They probably felt that by pushing me away that way, I was going to be afraid, and I would not go to the picket-line any more. But I got so mad, because I said: "They humiliated me, I became very angry and now it is going to be worst on him because no one does that to me." I thought to myself: "I do not care if he is the patron or whoever, but he should have acted legally, not like that."

Q What happened, Paulina? Did they take you to jail?

A: Yes, I called Sara because it was the only phone number I remember. I wanted for her to call Alicia because I did not know what to do. Sara called Alicia and later on they paid for the bail. When I got out, everybody was waiting for me outside. But, well--I was inside for a little time, like two hours, but it seemed like an eternity. We all hugged each other and cried together.

Q What did you do when you left the detention center?

A: We went to the union hall and talked to all the workers and everything. But I was very afraid of what my husband was going to say. He did not know anything, and he had his own beliefs. He said that--he was never going to be in jail." Maybe that is what still
hurting a lot because he thought that way. He just said that he will never go to jail, and I did. I did go to jail and that was very hard.

Q: You were detained for something very different and unjust.
A: Yes, but it was something that I could have avoided.

Q: How could you have avoided it?
A: If I saw that the other workers were not going a whole lot, I should have done the same—just not go to the picket line.

Q: But your consciousness did not let you.
A: Well, it is true. But, I could have avoided all those problems.

Q: Did you tell your husband immediately?
A: No, I did not tell him. Alicia and Newman talked to me, and we agreed for them to come and talk to him. Paco, my husband, has never talked to me about it. He has never asked me exactly what happened. He just heard what Alicia told him and did not say anything. But he did not behave angrily at me. He just behaved indifferently like nothing had happened.

Q: Did you continue being active in the union?
A: Oh yes. I was at the picket-line the next day, with more conviction and anger. So, I was there all day. That same day he [the boss] came out and saw me. All our supporters were so angry at him. They were all holding picket-line signs, and they were screaming at him. He became so upset that he grabbed some picket-line signs and ripped one apart.

Q: Did you call the police?
A: No, I do not know why. There were many people from the community, and all the workers, and that is what he did. He also threw all my things in a box into the street. I really did not care because I had no plans to return to work at that place.
Q: Do you remember when the incident happened?

A: No, I do not remember. I went back to the picket-line on August 13, 1988. So, it must had happened on August 12, 1988. The union used this incident to change the kind of strike. The workers were on a economic strike. Due to the incident, they changed the economic strike to an unfair labor practice strike. [Please see Neil Herring's second interview, Page 13, for more information].

Q: Did you continue participating in the strike?

A: Yes, I continued.

Q: I understand that the patron gave you a termination check. How did it happen?

A: Yes, he threw it at me the same day he broke the picket line sign. I did not see how much money it was. I did not look at it. Later on, I was told to cash it, so I cashed it because I needed the money.

Q: How was your situation at home with your husband?

A: I did not have any problems with my husband because he always told me that if I wanted to continue, it was my choice. He said that he was working and that he could even work over time. My daughter was little and my sister-in-law who was living with us helped around the house and babysat for me.

Q: I also understand that the union sued the patron for firing you like that, do you remember?

A: Yes, months later, after people went back to work. The National Labor Relations Board (: NLRB) told the patron that he did not have the right to fire me. The union lawyer, Neil Herring, talked to me, and the NLRB representative interviewed me. We went to court and won the case.
Q: What were you doing while the case was in court? Did you find another job?

A: I started working part time in a hotel because we were going for vacation to México in December, and I did not want to find a permanent job. I had to wait until we came back from Mexico. I started working where I continued working in February.

Q: What did you do when you received the notification from the NLRB deciding in your favor to keep your job at Calliope Designs?

A: Around March [1989], Calliope Designs called me to let me know that my job was waiting for me. I did not want to leave my present job, and I did not want to go back to Calliope Designs. However, I just wanted to go back for two days to make a political statement. Since I was working the night shift in my new job, I worked in the morning those two days at Calliope Designs. The first day, I worked until 2pm. The next day, I stayed until 12 pm. I had already written a letter with Alicia and Newman resigning from my work at Calliope Designs. By the time they [parones] received my letter, I was picking my belongings up. I was very angry at Lupe Farias because despite the fact that she was Mexican, she was always against us. The patrones called me into the office and she came along, probably to translate for them. I became very angry at her, and treated her bad. She could not say anything because we were in the patrones' office. They knew that they could not do anything to me because I could charge them again. Before I left, I gave a little speech to all the workers. I told them not to give up and to continue the struggle.

Q: How were the working conditions when you went back to work for those two days?

A: Well, I did not care about atmosphere. There was tension, maybe because I was returning to work. Nobody knew I was returning only for two days. Everybody was very happy. Some people gave me flowers and ballons. They all seemed very happy. However, there was lots of tension among the workers.

Q: How did you see the workers' morale?
A: I would not be able to tell you.

Q: Do you think that the strike was a victory, or a defeat, for the union?

A: I do not know how to answer that question because we did not achieve what we wanted. I do not think it was victory. But I do not think it was a defeat because we had proven that we, as Mexicans, also have rights, and that we can also do things in this country. So, if we unite ourselves, we could do it again.

Q: It was a victory that you as a Mexican group had the strength to fight for your rights. Do you think you were an example for other Mexicans working in factories?

A: Yes, you saw the Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF), how they organized themselves. They even won better things than we did. We were a motivation to them.

Q: How about other workers, like the Calistoga Water workers?

A: Yes.

Q: Since you left Calliope Designs, how did you keep in contact with the rest of the workers?

A: I would go to their meetings once in a while. I also continued signing checks for the union.

Q: Some workers had commented about two workers working for the patron, that they were spying on you and passing information on to the patron?

A: I do not know anything about it. We used to suspect Alicia and Uriel Caballero. They did not talk directly with the patron, but they had a close friendship with Lupe Farias. They both always seemed eager to have the patron on their side.
Q: Did Alicia and Uriel Caballero gain any benefits due to their behavior towards the *patrones*?

A: No that I know. The only thing they won was consideration from the *patrones* or the supervisors during working hours by receiving easy-to-make ornaments. So that helped them to make more money.

Q: How did you feel when the union started falling down?

A: Well, by that time I hardly went to the union hall. I did not know exactly how the union closed down. However, I think that it was due to a lack of commitment because everybody took different paths. After all we struggled together and all the things that happened, I think that we should have kept it alive. But no, nobody paid any attention to it. We all went different ways.

Q: What happened when you found out about the *patrones* opening a sweat-shop in Tijuana, Mexico? I know that by that time, you had been gone from the company for several years.

A: I was worried about my ex-coworkers. When Sara Ochoa told me about it, I worried about the workers who were old and who were injured because of the many years of working there. I wondered about Mario and Martha, so all I could do is help Rita get a job in the same company I was working for.

Q: Paulina, to conclude the interview, how do you feel about everything? What are the positive and not-so-positive experiences you drew from the union organizing?

A: I learned a lot. I, as a worker go to work, and it does not matter what kind of a *patron* I have. He can be a nice person, but it does not matter because they [the *patrones*] always see the worker as that: simply a worker. *Patrones* see workers as money machines --who all we do is produce for them. When the worker cannot produce any more for the patron, they lay us off or fire us. Without any regard for how good we were or how much we produced for them. For that reason, I personally, in my job --the *patron* and her daughter; I do not care for them. If I feel like it, I
greet them. Otherwise, I just keep on working. Why? Because they are paying me for how much I can produce for them. They are not paying me for being nice to them.

Q: So the union gave you moral strength?

A: Oh yes, it gave much more strength. I realized that not everything is quite nice when the patron comes and says "hi." I changed.
Elena Pulido, worker
Calliope Desings

Q: Were did you come from?
A: Michoacan, Mexico

Q: Before you came to California, did you have any union organizing experience?
A: No, never. I had never worked before in Mexico.

Q: How old were you when you came to California?
A: I think I was 30 years old.

Q: Was Calliope Designs your first job?
A: No, I had work before at Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF), I worked there for approximately 4 years.

Q: What did you do there?
A: I worked cleaning crabs and peeling shrimp. Later on I worked at the salmon station and as a filetera (fileeing fish). My next job was in a nursery.

When I was working there I decided that I wanted to attend school, so I went to Windsor to California Human Development Corporation (CHDC). At CHDC they asked me if I wanted to work at CD. They paid me for the training. It was not a lot but it was something. I enrolled myself and I was told that there was the opportunity to obtain new skills at Calliope Designs. They showed me the monitos (ornaments) and asked me if I wanted to learn how to make them. In reality, I did not have the need to work but I said yes. So that is how I was sent to that place.

Q: Do you remember the year you started working there?
Q: How were the working conditions at that time?

A: When I started, it was very good. We were few workers, not a lot. We were 6 or 7. At that time the real owner was the supervisor; there was not a boss. She was the one who helped us, who did things for us. Actually there were two women: the owner's wife and her sister. Two sisters. The sister was the real owner. The wife was also nice. The Sir...Well they [the women] were the business owners. He just helped them sometimes with drawings; he had some experience. But they were the real bosses. They were the ones who paid us, and they were in charge of everything. But we worked very happily. There was a young woman who made the masa (dough) because, you know; we did not know anything [meaning English]. So she would make a little masa for each one of us. But we worked very happy. As the time went by, the business became more prosperous...

Q: Where was the company located when you were but a few workers?

A: We were near K-Mart. It was a small shop. But since we were few, it was okay.

Q: How was the racial breakdown?

A: Everybody was blanca (white), then one from Brazil and myself. The Brazilian woman spoke some Spanish but you know that Portuguese is very different from Spanish. So, without any understanding of the language, they gave me the job. I was the first Mexican working there. They paid half of my salary and CHDC paid the other half for three months. After three months, it was up to the employer if we stayed or not because he had to pay your full salary. Later on, a Mexican lady named Teresa starting working there. Later on more people came. But, I was the first Mexican. After that, the business started growing. They put one of the same Americanas (North-American women) as a supervisor. She was also nice. The only thing is that when we moved to Tesconi Circle, the business was bigger. They needed bookkeepers and many things because the business was bigger, and there were more workers. We lost all direct contact with the owners.
Q: Why if you worked for so long, did they not offer you a position as a supervisor?

A: It is not like I did not like the job. The reason is that a person did not know the language. I think it is hard for a person to take a job like that. I understand that even if a person has been working there for many years, this person cannot do that job for the simple reason of the language. And since there were people with two languages, it was hard to communicate with everyone. A person accepts that there are things that she cannot do because...why should I get mad because they did not give me the job? No, no, no, it is impossible.

Q: When did you start having problems? Were the supervisors becoming tough on you, or was it the fact that the patron was paying you less for the ornaments?

A: We started having problems with them [the employer] because...let's say...this is the beginning of the year. So when you started working, you saw a paper on the wall by the phone informing you that if a monito was paid at a dollar the previous year, in January it was reduced to .90 cents. Others were reduced to .10 or .05 cents. We spent approximately two years working on that situation. Just as a cover up, they paid more for some so that we did not feel bad. The truth is that it was more; was they reduced that which they raised. We were losing; we had to work faster to make the same money. At that point, we started saying: "Well no! They [the owners] said they did not know what was happening. But we said how could you not know if you are the owners?". Many of the workers started thinking that it was the supervisors who were making these changes. They had meetings [supervisors], and they said: "Lets do this, lets do that". Because...they said...there were some nice supervisors, but some were not so nice.

Q: Did you have meetings with the patrones once in a while?
A: Well not that much. Well there were meetings...the very bad thing was that all of the sudden, we heard all English, so only those who knew a little could understand what they said. What did we know? That is why we should not blame them for everything. One herself is the responsible.

Q Did you have somebody to translate for you during these meetings?

A: Almost at the end, when our problems were worst. Lupe the supervisor -- it was she who said things and translated for us -- the little we understood. Sometimes she said the truth, sometimes she did not say the truth. She always said everything in the 

patrone's favor. So one believed only half, because she said what she wanted, and what she did not want, she did not say. Maybe she did not understand fully English. It is true that she did not speak English fluently. They did have their meetings over there...That is why the others [workers] said that they [the supervisors] were responsible for the changes in our salary. When she started working there, she started making monitos, then she took another position. Then she came back to make monitos. But it was not working for her because she was not good at making them. She was fully aware of what was happening on both sides, and that is why people blamed her and other supervisors for what was happening. I do not blame her, because sometimes we just imagine things without fully knowing.

Q What year did they start paying you less for the ornaments?

A: Like two or three years before we organized the union. At that time my daughter Maria was working there.

Q But she spoke English right?

A: Yes. The 

patron told her one time that the workers had made a lot of money, and it was his time to make money. And, it was then that they started paying less for our work. My daughter left the shop at that time. It was good for her to work there because she had little children, and she could leave whenever she needed.
Later on she found another job and she left... It was all of us who gave our opinion in terms of what to do. But, after that, it was not the same. People had different opinions as to what to do.

Q How did you organize yourselves not to work that Monday?

A: Well, we all talked. Since we worked together, we all took our lunch brake together. We discussed that it was not okay what was happening, and many thought that it was hard to do the ornaments. But, as we learned, others could do it, too. Our work was not so very difficult after all. But it takes time to learn. So we thought and said: "Since it takes a long time to learn, let's stop working. He has to pay us." We did not ask for much. We asked him to leave the pay for the ornaments the way they were before. We did not want a huge raise, only to pay what was right. We all made the decision to stop working.

Q Who suggested to you to go to California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA?)

A: I do not remember. I only know that we were told that somebody could help us at that place.

Q What happened when you went? Did everybody go, or did you send a committee?

A: We all went. From there, they referred us to Alicia [Sanchez]. We got together with Alicia, and from then on, everything started. We went back to work and the patron did not want to pay what we deserved. I felt we were caught in the middle. On one side was the wife; on the other the sir --because they could not agree on anything... I understand that his business had many expenses, but it was not a lot that we were asking them for. We just wanted to be paid the same, no more no less.

Q After you met with Alicia [Sanchez] and Newman [Strawbridge] and decided to form the union. You walked in the shop the same day with your home made buttons saying --I want a union. (Quiero un Sindicato.) What was the patron's reaction?
A: From that time on, he never talked to us again. He was mad. He said many things, but I do not know because I do not speak English. But, he was mad. And, he was right; it was his business.

He was losing money. Why should I tell you the contrary? But, as I said, people were not asking for a lot --just a little. If he would have agreed, we all would have been happy with each other.

Q: How were the supervisors treating you after you started organizing the union?

A: How can I tell you? They stopped talking to us. It was not the same --the environment was very tense.

Q: Did the patron try to divide you? To have some workers on his side?

A: No, he never did. He did not talk to anybody.

Q: When you met with Alicia and Newman what did you discuss?

A: About work: What actions we were wanted to take. It is so long ago that I do not even remember the details. We all told her [Alicia] that we could start our own shop. That we could do the same job. But, in reality, it is a little hard. She did not know anything about our work. Although, everything is possible. So I think she could not have helped us. It was easy for us to do it, because we were used to doing it. But, we did not have the capital.

Q: Since you did not start your own business, how did you decide to go on strike?

A: Well, let me tell you. We all went because Nobody knew what a strike was all about. We heard people talk about it. But, I had never suffered it in my own flesh. To me I think we all were in the same boat. We did not know what was going to happen. We just said: "Let's go on strike." But, in reality, we were not sure what was going to happen.
Q: Do you think that you were fully informed by Alicia and Newman about the benefits and consequences of a strike?

A: Well, I could not tell you. I do not remember if we were fully prepared.

Q: Well, did they say to you; go on strike means that you may go back in one week, one month one year, or maybe never?

A: Maybe yes, maybe not. I do not remember. Maybe they told us because somebody is supposed to know...In reality I have a very bad memory.

Q: When you decided by vote to go on strike, how did you feel, Dona Elena?

A: In reality, I felt bad because I was not used to doing those things. I felt bad for the people who worked in our place when the people [meaning supporters] on the picket line insulted them. I did not feel okay. But what was worst was that the other compañeras (coworkers)...I had to go to the picket line at certain hours because that was my shift...So the others asked me to cover their shift also because they said they had to do errands. They were all lies. They did not have any errant to do. They went to work, and that was not okay. They went to work, and what did I do? What did they have to do? I did not work during those three months. So, the others went to work and asked me to cover for them. It was wrong because among compañeras, they should have said: "I am going to work some days, and then you go work some days"...I think so. We were all suffering the same thing. I personally was suffering a lot. What really helped me was that one of my sons worked with the firemen and made good money, and he did not have a family yet (meaning married). He helped me to pay my house bills (bills). Other people like Prieta (dark one --Consuelo Zavala) she did not have anybody to help her. It was hard for her. Others, maybe because they were more active, AS helped them. She helped some a lot. She gave them money for the rent and this and that. As far as I am concern, we were all suffering, she should had helped everybody equally. For some, she argued that it was because of the couple that was working there. We were not a couple, but we suffered the same. We did not have anybody to help in the house. It
was the same because at that time my husband was not working at all. I was the one who earned a salary. And so, it was hard. People think that...Who really helped me was my son because you know that the house bills do not wait. Later on I had to help him because it was a lot for him. My other son also worked but he did not make as much as the other. And there are some sons who help you and there are sons who do not.

Q: How did you feel about the union itself? Was it working for you? Was it what you expected?

A: How can I tell you? I felt in some ways okay and in some ways bad. It is as I was telling you. I did not know anything about a strike before. All of the sudden, since you do not know anything, you get involved. And, when you want to leave, you want to get out. You cannot; it is like everything. We all suffered. We did not know, we were blind. We did not know what to do. We imagined some things, but we all thought that the Sir was going to accept our proposal, and that was our mistake. They also (meaning the employer) lost. But, for those who have, it is not the same. Because if it is two or three months, they can support themselves. But us? The poor ones? We cannot be without working. That is what we did not think about in advance --to think and clearly see what we were going to do. We had to pay for rent, food, and you have to eat. What helped me was that I did not have little children.

Q: Were you part of the negotiation committee during the strike?
A: Yes I did go.

Q: How did you see the negotiations? Did you feel hopeful about them?

A: Well, they [the owners] did not seem upset --not happy, but polite.

Q: Were you present when the incident between Paulina Martinez [a worker] and the security woman happened?
A: No, I was not there.

Q: How did you feel when you saw the scabs going to work in your place?

A: Well, I never told them anything, never, never. Why should I tell you that I insulted them. I felt bad because they knew that we were outside for them too. Because, in the future we could all benefit. And yet, they always worked. Maybe because they had greater need. Maybe because they wanted to harm people. Who knows? I did not feel okay for them to work because that was my job; they were taking it away from me.

Q: Did you know them?

A: I hardly knew some.

Q: What happened when you went back to work?

A: When we went back to work we were all divided. They [the scabs] worked on one side, and we worked on the other. We could not talk to them.

Q: What did you win with the strike? what were the benefits?

A: Well, we won our job back.

Q: What else?

A: [laughing] Leave --because the work ended. Leave because they (meaning the employer) moved the shop. Alicia used to say that they may move the shop a few miles always, but look how far they moved? So what did we win? What was worse for me was that some companeros like Alicia and Uriel Caballero helped the patron train people in Mexico. They were always allied with Lupe. They cooperated with the patron in Tijuana. When they [the patrones] started having meetings, they called Alicia and Uriel, but they never said anything about it. But we were told that the Sir promised them that he was going to make them supervisors. One time, Lupe was going to Mexico on an airplane and all of that.
Because the Sir paid for that. Alicia even took her children to Mexico to her mother's. She and Lupe traveled very often...They said that they made very good money. Alicia should not have cooperated with the *patron*. Nevertheless, we had been on strike for a while. She was best friends with Lupe. [Lupe Farias was one of the two Mexicans who did not support the union. She always took the employer's side. Lupe also trained the scabs for different jobs]. And so what happened? They [Lupe, Alicia and Uriel Caballero] were fired as soon as the Sir did not need them any more.

Q  Do you think that Alicia and Uriel Caballero were informing the *patron* about the union activities long before the strike, during the strike or did they only cooperate after the strike?

A: Before the strike, I do not know. I could not tell you. But, why then were they offered those jobs? Because nobody else had that offer made to them. Although, this was almost right before they closed the shop. But as a union members, they never told us about their activities. We all said among ourselves: "Why did they (the employer) not request from anyone else to work in Mexico? No. Only them, Alicia and Uriel."

Q  How were you affected with all the changes at Calliope Designs, since you were the one with more seniority? How did you feel about the union?

A: I felt the same. But, let me tell you, you always find lots of discrimination. I thought it was because of my age; I do not know. There is always lots of discrimination at the work site. It is true that I had worked there for a long time but they always preferred the new ones.

Q  Mexicans or North-Americans?

A: Mexicans. There were times that they [the employers] gave the better paid ornaments to them to make. I do not know why! Maybe it was the *patrones*, or the supervisors who made those decisions. I think that, in most places, the people with seniority have the preference. If that is the case, seniority did not count in that place.
Q Did you ever try to talk to them about it?

A: No.

Q When you went back to work after the strike, did you think that you won something with the strike?

A: No, we did not win anything. The only thing that we won was the moody faces we saw every day. We may have won something, but not better pay, because although the ornaments stayed at the same pay. However, the patrones did not reduce the pay anymore. Whenever they created a new ornament, they set how much money they were going to pay us for making them. But, we were making less money. They hired a new man to check our work. I do not know why because we had our supervisor. He just came, took the ornaments already made, and checked them. Maybe he was from Tijuana or someplace else.

Q Do you think that the patron planned to move the shop to Mexico before the workers started organizing? Or do you think that he decided to move it because of your organizing?

A: I think he moved it due to our organizing. We did not think about it. Everything seemed so easy to us. We did not stop and think that he could take the shop some place else. Nobody thought that he could do that. I personally think that because everything seemed so easy to us. We thought that nobody could train as well and as fast as us. However, people do not get a good training unless some workers train them because it takes a while for people to make good ornaments. But when they learn, they can make good ornaments. Lupe and Chana were the ones who trained them. But, they were not that good anyway. The patrones had to find workers who could train the new people well. So they choose Uriel and Alicia Caballero. They were even talking about moving to Tijuana. Little did they know that the patrones were going to kick them out whenever they could not use Lupe and all of them any more.
Q Some people had mentioned to me that they are quite sure that Uriel and Alicia Caballero were informing the patron about the union activities long before the strike ended, because whenever you agreed about an action, the patron would come with something else. What do you know about it?

A: Those situations in fact happened, but I am not sure if it was Alicia and Uriel or some other people. Who knows? I cannot blame them. What we saw... And this has to do with what I was telling you. We questioned ourselves about the fact that, among all the workers, they choose Alicia and Uriel to travel. They had small children and a more complicated life to leave. And that is why people think they were informing the patron, that they were on his side. I am not so sure.

Q Lets move to another point. Were you the union treasurer?

A: No. The only thing I did was to signed the checks. I do not remember who took the money to the bank. Paulina and I signed the checks.

Q When you went back to work and you were divided and could not talk. How was the situation?

A: We had a difficult time. There were some women who wanted to talk to us, but they were not allowed. Lupe did not let them talk to us. They probably thought that we were going to do something to them. After awhile things got easier.

Q: I think Lupe was quite upset about everything that people told her and the rally in her house.

A: Maybe she was mad. But that is life: she should not feel resentful. I personally do not feel resentful to anyone.

Q: Not everybody is as nice as you Dona Elena. People have told me that as soon as you went back to work Fina had an accident. Do you remember how it did happened?
A: I was working, but I did not see because we worked on the other side. When she came out crying, she told us that the supervisor had thrown a box on her head. We all felt mad. Why did he do that? Fina was a worker there, and she was working. Only because they wanted for her to leave?

Q: What happened when Fina came to your side crying? What did you do? Did you stop working and talk to the patron?

A: I do not remember.

Q: Do you remember what the union did to protect Fina?

A: No.

Q: Other people were commenting that it was around that time that the company laid-off the most active union members. Do you remember who those people were?

A: Mario, Sara, Javier and Rafael. They were laid off for one month. I do not remember if they were laid off together or at different times.

Q: Did you continue having meetings with the patron?

A: No.

Q: When you had problems, how did you communicate with him?

A: I do not remember what we did.

Q: What happened when the patron started closing down the shop? Did he tell you his plans?

A: No he did not tell us anything. One day when we arrived at work, there was no masa. So, we wondered: "How are we going to work?" Lupe was just laughing. When the patron arrived he told us this is it. He told us to pick-up our belongings, making sure that we did not take anything that did not belong to us. We had our own
equipment to work. We either had bought it there or someplace else. So, we picked up our stuff and left. Only Lupe and her niece stayed working. But, she was kicked out soon after.

Q: How about Uriel and Alicia?
A: No, everybody was out that day. including them.

Q: Did you receive some kind of compensation?
A: Nothing, they said that they did not have the means.

Q: Do you remember when that happened?
A: No.

Q: You did not know this was coming?
A: We imagined because they were taking people to train people there. We knew it since they were bringing ornaments to finish them here. Juan was the one working doing the finishing.

Q: Did anybody ask where the ornaments were coming from?
A: Yes, we asked, but they told us that they were going to have both plants working. The one in Tijuana, and this one. We were fully aware of the other plant's existence, but we did not know that this one was going to be closed. You know, that business got better. That is why we thought the patron was doing fine. Alicia Caballero kept going there to train people so the production would be faster and better. I think she should have told us what were the patron's plans.

Q: Was the union gone at that time?
A: Yes, but I think that she should have told us about the plant closure. With time we could have looked for another job. But, since we did not know, we had to collect unemployment when he close the plant. That is why I felt happy when she was also laid-off, same as us.
Q: Do you remember when the union stop working?
A: No, I do not know.

Q: Do you remember when you all got laid-off?
A: In the middle of August of 1993.

Q: Can you give me your opinion about the process of forming a union, the strike and all the experiences you had with the union?
A: They are experiences that helped us in the future. I do not blame the strike. I blame the *patron* because we were not asking for a lot. He probably lost a lot with the strike, but I think he did not care.

Q: Do you think they were constructive experiences?
A: I had both, good and bad experiences. The bad one was the strike. It was bad because the same workers who were supposed to be on strike looked for other jobs and left the strike. We all suffered, but some more than others. I wish we could have been all united. Look at Javier Arreguin --A worker who pressured everybody to go on strike. He looked for a job immediately. Later on, he regreted being on strike. We do not know what could have happened if we did not go on strike. Maybe the I would have changed, maybe not.

Q: Are you satisfied that all of you were able to organize to show the *patron* that you had courage? And that Mexicans can organize themselves?
A: Yes, even though, everything is gone. I do not think it is the end of the world, but what can you do?

Q: Anything else you want to say?
A: It was hard because we all had different opinions. It was hard, but it is in the past. I think that the union is all gone.
Q: Would you join another union?
A: No, I am too old to do that.

Q: But you have now the experience, can you imagine how things could have been if you had somebody like you now with your experience?
A: Things could have been different. But it is hard, very hard. It was a tough experience.
Sara Ochoa, worker, Calliope Designs

Q: Sara can you tell me where you come from?
A: I come from Michoacan, Mexico.

Q: Did you work in Michoacan?
A: No, never.

Q: Did you have union organizing experience in Michoacan?
A: No.

Q: How old were you when you came to California?
A: I was 24 years old.

Q: When did you start working at Calliope Designs?

Q: What was your position at Calliope Designs?
A: I was making ornaments.

Q: Where was the company located at that time?
A: It was located by Industrial Dr., near K-Mart. The place was like a portable building. It was not a building. It was a *trailer*.

Q: How many people worked at Calliope Designs at that time?
A: I think there were no more than 20.

Q: How was the racial breakdown?
A: There were approximately 4 to 5 Mexicans and the others were blancos (white people)

Q: Were everybody involved in the ornament production?

A: Yes. Well, there were the patrones (owners) and the patrona's (owner woman) sister that was also the owner. They made new [ornament] samples for us to make. They mostly supervised our work. It was like a family, all united.

Q: How were the working conditions at that time?

A: The patrones treated everybody fine, as I told you [the company] was small and we were like a family. They talked to people, played with us, and all that. The environment was very family oriented. You did not feel like working for a patron.

Q: Do you remember the year the company was moved to Tesconi Circle?

A: No, I do not remember, I think it was around 1980. Two years after I started working there.

Q: Did the patron hire more people after you move to Tesconi Circle?

A: Yes, when we moved to Tesconi Circle, the place was bigger and there were more tables--when we worked at la traila.--the tables were plain kitchen tables; round and square tables. When we moved to Tesconi Circle, the tables were industrial working tables, with iron legs, larger and taller. The tables were designed with shelves on top for us to put our belongings. These tables were better conditioned that the others.

Q: When you moved to Tesconi Circle in 1980, how many people was working there and how was the ethnic breakdown?

A: There were already many more Mexican workers because Mexicans were the ones who produced more. White people did not last in that job.

Q: Why?
A: Because that work was per contract, per piece rate. You were train for a month by the company and you were paid by the hour, minimum wage. After a month you worked by contract. You had to make certain number of ornaments to make money [good wages], if not, you were going to make less. As a rule the company paid you the minimum wage the day you did not make enough ornaments. But they did not like for a person to produce less than the minimum wage because they were losing money. So they paid you the minimum for only one day. You knew that the following day, you had to produce more than the minimum salary, or if you made more than that. Well it was better for you.

Q: I understand that the patrona's sister was also part of the business. Do you remember in what year she left the company?

A: I do not remember. But I think it was after 1980. She was a very kind person towards the workers, I think she had problems with her brother in law, the patron. So she left.

Q: How were the working conditions when she was part of the business?

A: They were better because she did more for the workers, she did not make any changes in how much money they paid us for the ornament's manufacturing. For example, if they made a new design. She explained to us ways to make it faster and easier for us, so that we made more money.

Q: How were the working conditions after she left the company?

A: When she left, we saw less and less the patrona and the patron. What I mean, is that since we moved to Tesconi Cr. the situation changed, then the lady left and things were much more difficult. They [the owners] were seen very little, we heard that they were doing business trips, etc. We started having supervisors and we never again talked to the patrones. Anything we needed we asked the supervisors.

Q: Do you remember the year the patrones started paying you less for the ornaments' manufacture?
A: It was approximately since 1986.

Q: How it did happened, can you tell me?

A: Well, the first year they told us that they were going to lower the pay for the ornament making [Mrs. Ochoa was contacted by telephone to confirm what other workers had previously said in their interviews] because the patron said to Dona Elena's daughter that the workers had made to much money. And that it was his turn to make money. The patron said that they were selling the ornaments at a lower price, and they had many more salaries to pay because they had more people working; The dough making, the finishing person, everything. That is how they told us, because they were selling them for less money. After that year, each year they reduced systematically the payment for each ornament.

Q: In addition to reducing the payment in the ornaments, how were the working conditions?

A: First of all, the people was not happy any more because if they paid us .50 cents for an ornament, one year, they next year, they paid us .40 cents. They had already reduced .10 cents. There were even some ornaments that .20 cents were reduced. Then if the previous year they paid us .50 cents for each ornament and we made a 100. We made $ 50.00 that day. If the following year they paid for the same ornament .35 cents. I made only $ 35.00 a day. So we were losing. If I wanted to make $ 50.00 the way I did before, I had to make more ornaments, I had to work harder. That is why people were not happy.

Q: Since that time, people were not happy, and you started organizing yourselves. Other workers have had a difficult time remembering how you started organizing yourselves. Some are even confused about the timing between the day--Monday, Martin Luther King (MLK) day—you did not work and the strike itself. How the idea of stop working came about to scare the patron?

A: The idea came form the workers, we the workers. They [the owners] reduced the payment for the ornaments year after year. The reason the workers were upset was because the patrones did not have any communication with us, they never talked to us. When they wanted to
make changes in the company, reduce the salary, they just put a list on the wall next to the phone. One day, somebody used the phone and saw the prices lowered once more. We got upset because there was an ornament that was paid at $1.55, and that year in 1988, when we stop working, they were paying the same ornament at $1.00. Then how much money they had reduce? .55 cents! And we had to do the same work. That is why the people...we started talking among ourselves since the majority was Latino we talked. We were upset for what the company was doing. We decided that we were not going to work one Monday. We were going to the company, but we were not going to work. We all decided to that. We entered and the woman who prepared the masa (dough) had everything ready. We had cutters and everything ready but we did not work. They asked us: "What is happening? Why you are not taking your masa." We told them: "We are not going to work, we are going to drink coffee and we want to talk to the patrones because we think that what the patrones are doing is not fair because they are not giving us any explanations about the ornaments' cut in pay. They are not even taking the workers into consideration." They [patrones] said that we were making too much money, and that we could not make that money in other places because we were uneducated. But we made that money working hard, with great efforts. We thought that if we each made a $100.00 in one day. How much money the patrones were making? How much money they made? They were paying us only a $100.00 a day, but how much money they were making? That is why we decided to get together and stop working. But we did not say anything, we said that we wanted to talk to the patrones. The supervisors called the patrones and told them that the workers did not want to work. so we were there, just drinking and drinking coffee but we did not work.

Q: The patrones talked to you?

A: Oh yes! They came and talked to us and we had a meeting of approximately three hours. We told them about all the things we were upset. The fact that they did not take us into account, and that they should have a meeting first with all the workers, and explain to us why ornaments were going to be cut in pay. They said that even though they reduce our salary, we made too much money. But we told them that if we made to much money, how much money were they making? they should take into account our opinion.
Q: How were you communicating with them? Who was translating for you?

A: There was Fina, Angelica and Holanda Arzate spoke very good English. And of course Lupe Farias. She was interpreting for the patrones, and the patrones came out very upset. But we told them that we were not going to work. We went home and they stayed in a meeting.

Q: How is that you decided to go to California Rural Legal Assistance (Referred in the document as: CRLA) to see Christina Briano [a CRLA staff member].

A: Somebody, I think Elena talked to Gloria her daughter, then Gloria told her to call some place were we could do something. Gloria called CRLA and she was referred to Newman [Strawbridge]. That was the first time we met Newman, he explained to us what to do, and we talked to him and all of that. From then on we met systematically with Newman. Little by little we started--the decision to have a union was not over night. We took time to think about it. Newman told us that we had already left work and that if we went back just like that, the patron will fired us any day. He said that we had to organize and protect ourselves. Because we had left our work, the patron was not going to trust on us any more. So we had to protect ourselves. That was one of the reasons for us to organize and form a union. the patrones forced us to take that step. They are to be blame because they already had lots of money, they were not thinking about the workers any more. They only wanted money for them and only for them. That is why we decided to organized ourselves and form a union. We wanted to have better and more benefits because there were people who had been already ten to twelve years and they were paid forty vacation hours at $ 5.00 the hour. That person could have made $ 15.00 per hour [a person who worked per piece rate or contract] but the patron did not pay the vacation based on the piece rate]. He only paid $ 5.00 and only forty hours a year. We thought that it was not fair.

Q: Did you have health insurance? Did you have to pay for it?

A: We paid for it. At the beginning when the patron gave us health insurance, he paid for the worker. If I wanted health insurance for my family, I had to pay for them. He paid only my part. Later on, arguing
that the insurance company was increasing the rates... If I remember
correctly, when I left (1993) I was paying $8.00 for me in addition to my
family's full coverage.

Q: Let's go back to the meetings you had with Alicia and Newman.

A: Well the first meeting we had was only with Newman. Alicia came
to the second meeting and she interpreted for us.

Q: When they came and talked to you. Did they inform you about
forming a union, the benefits and consequences of forming a union?

A: Yes. They explained everything to us. They told us that belonging
to a union, if we win it was good, and if we lose it was good too. They
explained to us the good and bad things, what we could have in the future.
They explained everything to us. When we had that meeting, Newman
told us to think about it to make a decision. Not in that moment, but to
take some days to think about it because to take that step was very
important.

Q: When Alicia and Newman left the meetings, did you discuss it
among yourselves?

A: We were always talking about that. We talked at work, always
making sure nobody could hear us.

Q: Like Lupe Farias?

A: Yes. We were always careful, we knew who could trust and who we
could not trust. We always talked about the break time, when we needed
to inform ourselves about something.

Q: How is that you decided to organize a union? did you call AS and
NS? How was the process to form a union?

A: Well, as I told you. From the first meeting we had with Newman,
then we had the second one in which Alicia interpreted for us. From then
on, we had meetings once a week. Once a week we got together and
started talking and as I told you, we saw as well as Newman saw that
people were very interested in forming a union. There were people who were very excited about it. But at the end that people were the weak ones. The people who were the most encouraged thought that we were going to get benefits we wanted, and it was not like that. Alicia and Newman explained to us that the struggle was not win over night, that it was going to take time. If we won, it was going to take time to receive benefits.

Q: Do you remember when you took the vote to form a union? If you do not remember the dates, it is okay. But was everybody there? And how many?

A: Everybody. We were approximately twenty to twenty two. Because there was a woman who was sick, Celia Alcazar. And she also voted. (Paulina Martinez was pregnant? Did she go to that meeting?) Yes, and she also voted.

Q: When you voted, it was a secret ballot. And it showed that everyone wanted a union. And someone’s son, I think Dona Elen’s made some buttons?

A: I do not remember who made them.

Q: Do you remember that if you wanted a union, you had to inform the patron in whatever way you could, like a letter, a meeting, or simply; wearing buttons about union organizing. So the next morning, all of you walked into the shop wearing your [I want a union] buttons.

A: Yes,

Q: How was that morning?, How were you all feeling? How was the supervisors and patrones reaction to see you wearing buttons?

A: Well. Are you asking me about the day we voted, or the day we walked in the shop wearing buttons?

Q: When you went to work wearing buttons. You alredy had voted and agreed to form a union, the next step was to inform the patron about it to make your campaing for union representation legal. The way you informed him was wearing hand made buttons. Do you remember? the
buttons said: "We want a union or "Queremos un Sindicato". Do you still having those buttons?

A: I do not remember.

Q: Can you look for them, also any other inofrmation in paper I can look at.

A: I think I have newspapers.

Q: What happened that morning? When you all gattered in the parking lot and all of you pinned your buttons?

A: Well, when we got in the patrones were not there.

Q: Where were they?

A: They always came around 9:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m. They were always late. But the woman supervisor did not look to happy. The woman who made the masa, who was always on the company and patrones' side was not happy either. And we were very happy, we had achieved through the vote the agreement of wanting a union.

Q: What happened when the patrones came around 9:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m.?

A: Well, the patron always laughted in ways to ridiculize us. He always laughted that way, never talked to us. The patrona talked to us, but we felt it was mostly in a hypocritical way. She was not sincere.

Q: The patron stop talking to you since you started organzing, or was he like that always?

A: No, he changed since we started organizing the union because when he used to talked to the workers, he was a playful person. But since we started organizing—Well before that time because we did not see him a lot. But everytime he went to the plant he made funny coments, he tried to make us laugh. Nice coments. Later on, no. After he new our intentions of organizing, no more. Even to Juan, Juan Espinoza a worker. He
always worked with him, he always helped the *patron*. But since we started the organizing, he [patron] stop talking to Juan. If he needed something, he went to Lupe so that Lupe told Juan what he needed. He did not want to talk to Juan. And before, he always talked to him, even in Spanish. The little Spanish he knew, he talked in Spanish to Juan. When we started organizing, he totally stop talking to Juan. If Juan was right next to him, he called Lupe to translate for him. He was very mad.

Q: What happened after you made the buttons, and wear them in the shop? How long did you wait for the election?

A: I do not remember.

Q: How was the working situation, from the time you walk in to work wearing your buttons, to the day the Nationa Labor Relations Board (NLRB) came to hold the elections to have union?

A: The *patron* stop talking to us. For example, before we started the organizing, if we needed *masa*, we asked the person in charge of it. After the organizing, they made the *masa* whenever they wanted to. They saw us in a different way, they wanted to slow down production and that affected us financially.

Q: Did they continue reducing the payment for the ornament making?

A: No because they always reduced the payment at the beginning of the year, in January. And the election campaign took place between March and April. They had already reduced the pay in January.

Q: What happened when you, the workers had the election for a union? Were you nervous? Did you feel confident that you were going to win?

A: Yes we were nervous because we knew that if we did not win the election for the union, maybe the next day we were left without a job. Even though the majority of the workers wanted a union because you never know if at the voting time a person may change his or her mind. He may say; "No I do not want union." and we never know.
Q: So the NLRB representatives counted the votes and informe you immediately of the result?

A: Yes, and we won. I do not remember for how many. Lupe voted, but not the supervisors. I guess we won by a big margin 21 or 22 to 3. Lupe; of course voted agains the union.

Q: What happened after the election for representation? When did you start having negotiations with the *patron*?

A: In reality, after he accepted the union. The *patron* did not talk, well he did not even talk to us before. But after the election, he always argued that he could not talk to us. He said that he had to talk to our representatives.

Q: Who were the union representatives?

A: the union representatives were Alicia and Newman, they were the representatives. Therefore, he said that he could not negotiate anything with us. If he got new ornaments, he paid them very bad and we told him; "This ornament does not fit the salary because it is complicated and takes a long time to make it." Then he said; "I cannot negotiate with you, I cannot."

Q: He took an antagonist attitud?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you see Alicia and Newman as your representatives or the negotiators?

A: Well, we went to negotiations. I went to one, I think it was every month because later on they have a new supervisor. I mean, a foreman, but later they had a supervisor and a foreman. The foreman was the one who communicated with us because they (the *patrones*) did not want to have any kind of communication with us and I do not remember how we did the negotiations. But some times workers went to the negotiations.
Q: How did you sit to talk to them? Did you have translators? Was the entire meeting translated to the workers? did you arrive to the meetings with proposals?

A: Yes,

Q: When did you work in the proposals?

A: We had meetings, we got together with Alicia and Newman, all the workers and there we wrote—we all agreed on what we wanted.

Q: What did you want?

A: We wanted form them to stop cutting our wages, we wanted paid vacation. we wanted to have our vacation paid at the piece rate salary and not at $ 5.00, the hourly rate, we wanted more two weeks. We wanted sick days, and we also wanted the MLK day as a holiday. That was the first day we stop working...

Q: When you decided to stop working that Monday. Did you do it because it was MLK day, or because it was a mere coincidence?

A: It was a coincidence because we did not even remember it was MLK day. In fact, we did not know.

Q: Going back to the previous discussion. What else did you ask for?

A: Health insurance...The patron never talked to us, he always talked to Alicia or Newman. for example; If I was talking to him, he never looked at me. He looked at Alicia and Newman.

Q: How did you feel when he ignored you?

A: Well, I felt very uncomfortable because at that time, I was already working for him approximately ten years. I felt terrible that he took that atitude towards the workers because it was us who made him rich. Our work gave him thousands of dollars in profits. It was not Alicia or Newman. They were representing us, but if I was asking the patron a
question, he was responsible to answer to me, not to Alicia and Newman. They were working for us. We were the *patron* workers, not Alicia and Newman.

Q: What did you do when you saw that after three months of negotiations, you did not have an agreement with the *patron* for a contract?

A: Well, sometimes the workers got discouraged, sometimes workers regreted to be in the union.

Q: Since workers were becoming discouraged about the union. Do you think that you were fully prepared by AS and NS about unions and strikes? Its benefits if you win a contract, or its consequences if you lose?

A: Well, maybe no, because they told us that maybe we will win soon, but reality showed us the opposite because we had several problems later on. As I told you many workers were becoming very unhappy, things were getting worst and worst. We lost all the power inside the company. We could not discuss anything because the *patrones* attacked us immediately by telling us that they had to talk to the union representatives. So there were people who were not happy.

Q: Even though you did not Calliope Designs' costumers, you knew exactly the months when you had the pick in production? what were those months Sara?

A: Those months were approximately from July through December.

Q: But the key production months?

A: Oh, those were October, November, and December. Those three months were very important for the patron to met the production demands.

Q: What were the tactics you used to have an agreement since nothing was working?

A: We decided to go on strike.

Q: How did you reach to that decision?
After we organized ourselves and the *patrones* accepted the union. The company started giving us ornaments in which we were not making any money. That was their way to attack us. People who were not supporting the union received the ornaments from which we made our money.

**Q:** Who were they?

**A:** There were two American Indian women. They never wanted to participate in the union, despite the fact that we invited numerous times and visited them at their house. Also some Mexican women, like Consuelo Anguiano and Lupe Farias, they did not want to participate. I do not remember other names, but there were more people. These people were the ones who started making lots of money because the *patrones* gave them the best ornaments for weeks. and we received the hardest to make ornaments. Since the *patrones* were making new designs, we always got them and of course, you do not make money with new designs because you still practicing.

**Q:** When you talked to them about it, what was their response?

**A:** Well. that they needed the ornaments production, and that is why they gave us those ornaments.

**Q:** What the union did about it?

**A:** Nothing.

**Q:** How did you reach the conclusion to go on strike? Where there people who thought that July was not the best time to go on strike? Were AS and NS informed about the pick production months? They were suppossed to have experience in union organizing, and your union was very new. You did not have an union fund, yet you decided to go on strike. Why?

**A:** Well, Alicia and Newman told us that we should think about it, and if July was the best month to go on strike. But the majority of the workers thought...We did not thought about the timing, but how you are saying. AS and NS were suppossed to have experience, that is their job...
Q: Was there anybody who said: "Let's look at all the factors to evaluate if this is the right time to go on strike."

A: Well, in the first place, we did not have any financial funds to support ourselves in case the strike was prolonged. We did not have anything. It was an immature decision that we made. But as I told you: One of the reasons was because--I personally, had never been in a union, much less participated in a strike, and I think the it was similar for the majority of my companeros. We thought that we were going to control the situation very fast. and it was not like that. However, Alicia and Newman had the experience and they should have oriented us, as well as told us: you know what? What are the pick production months. But no. We started in June and it was not a good time to start a strike. What this meant was that we gave time to the patron to train other people for the months of pick production. In addition, we never stop to think that the patron could call workers who had worked there previously, who had experience making ornaments. We never thought about that and that was a very bad decision that we took, we the workers as well as Alicia and Newman. Because they may had seen us very enthusiastic, but they should have said this is not the right time. Because we went on strike in July, and October is the month when he starts getting very busy. Of course that he started getting ready since July, but the three months that were the heaviest were October, November and December. Since we did not think about that. Alicia and Newman should have thought about that. They should have told us to wait until October, maybe at that time we can win faster. It was our mistake and it was their mistake to go so soon on strike.

Q: After talking to some of the other workers. You and them had told me that the working situation got worst after you organize the union, negotiations were not taking you anywhere, and your salary was going down. Did you think at that time that the strike was going to accomplish what you could not accomplish during negotiations?

A: Well we thought that it was going to get worst--I personally was ninety percent sure that the situation was going to improve, but as I told you. Maybe it was because I did not have any experience in unions and strikes.
Q: When you discussed the strike with your co-workers, what came to mind?

A: I had seen strikes in Mexico, but I never paid any attention to them. I thought that a strike was going to be respected, what I mean is that if we were on strike, nobody was going to cross the line. That is what I thought, that the strike was going to be respected. We talked about that with Alicia and Newman and they told us about several things that we could do to hurt the patron, but later on, we could not do anything. They said that we could close the company because we could research--What I mean, no to close the company, but threaten it, but boycott it at the crafts shows that he went. They said that we could boycott the stores where he sold his merchandise. We were not able to do anything of that. No. Another thing is that we did not have support from the state, and I do not remember us discussing it. The support I am talking about is that the strike needed to be respected. There was no law to stop the patron from hiring other people to replace us. Truthfully speaking: We did not think seriously about all those things before going on strike. I personally felt that we had won the struggle. The strike was presented to us as a "piece of cake". I assumed they had experience on those matters, they had to explain all those issues more in detail, Or they should had told us not to do it at that time because we did not have the funds to support a strike.

When we decided to go on strike there were three members who pressured everybody to go on strike. They said that if we did not go strike at that time, they would leave the union". I am sure that they also felt that we were going to win overnight. And they were the first ones to leave the strike. They looked for a job immediately, and they hardly ever went to the strike.

Q: Did you form any committees to support you during the strike?

A: No, we just said one night we go on strike, and we did.

Q: How did you tell the patron that you were going on strike?

A: I do not remember exactly, I think we just went to work the next day, but did not go in. We just started walking up and down with our signs. Maybe we sent a letter to the patron in advance.

Q Sara, during our last interview you told me that the _patron_ [company owner or supervisor] cordoned sections of his property, so that you could not talk to the scabs [replacement workers]. When did he hire the two guards to protect the premises and the scabs?

A: I do not remember the date, but it was after he blocked the entrance in the back of the shop. A few days after that, the security man came to work for him.

Q Was the security man guarding front and back entrances?

A: Yes, he guarded both entrances. Sometimes his wife would work too, and she guarded the front and he guarded the back.

Q How many times a week did you cover the picket line?

A: I was there almost every morning. I was there beginning at 5:00 a.m. I went home around 10:00 or 11:00 am. and I went back to the shop in the afternoon.

Q How many workers covered the picket line with you?

A: At the beginning there were a lot. Then, later on, some started looking for work, and at the end it was only Dona Elena and myself.

Q What else can you tell me about the picket line? Was it a new experience? Did you have any difficulties? Or, was it a nice experience?

A: Well, the experiences were good and bad. Among the good experiences, was the community support. We did not think that,
Despite the short life of the union, we had so much impact in the community. And that was a beautiful experience for me personally. I think it was the same for all my companeros (co-workers) because we met many people who were ready to help us.

Q: Do you remember the weekly lunch meetings you had with the community?

A: Well, we ate, had an information meeting and then we formed a circle holding hands, and we prayed for the problems to be solved. We hoped that our prayers would soften the heart of the patron and for him to understand that we did not want anything that was not right for us. We were asking him reasonable things, and we the workers felt that we had justice on our side. We understood that he had expenses, too, but we wanted for him to understand that we also had right. Foremost, we wanted Respect! —To be taken into account when they decided to change the wage in piece rate. They had to discuss it first with the workers.

Q: When you say “community”, are you talking about the Mexican, labor, or white community?

A: At the beginning the majority of the people supporting us were white. Later on, people knew by word of mouth and there were other unions that supported us. And, then, the Latino community supported us. It was the first time that we saw something like that here. People from different colors and backgrounds supported us.

Q: Can you discuss your not so positive experiences?

A: Well, the bad experiences were when we decided to go on strike, we never thought that the patron could hire other people. We saw how other people went in to work. It was a very difficult thing to see somebody taking our place. After so many years of working there, it was a hard experience. That was harder than the problems I had in my house because you know. We did not have a job, we did not have an income. We were suffering in our houses because we did not have the money to provide the necessary things
for our family. We were very limited. However, that was not as important as obtaining what we wanted. The experience of seeing other people taking my place was hard. Latinos, Asians...What was painful was the fact that we tried to talk to them to get the. W, we understood they had the need to work. But they needed to understand that they were going to take our places. We had been working there for over ten years. We told them that if we were out, we were out because we wanted to be respected in our work.” And we also told them that they were “crossing the line.” They did not care about all those things we told them.

Q In addition to paid holidays, vacation, etc., were also demanding fair and equal treatment? Did you feel discriminated against because you were Mexicans?

A: I do not remember that to be a problem because the majority of the labor force was Mexican. The few whites who worked there, did not last because it was hard work.

Q How about the supervisors? Were they white? Did any of the Mexican workers ever became supervisor?

A: Yes, we did not agree about all supervisors being white because we thought that probably some of us did not have the qualifications to become supervisors, but there were other Mexicans who could be good supervisors. Like Dona Elena daughter’s [Maria]. She knows Spanish and English. She is a United States citizen. And, they never offered her a supervisory job. We never agreed with those procedures. We did not like the company always hiring white people who did not have any experience in how to make the ornaments. We thought that a supervisor had to have experience in how to make the ornaments.

Q How did monolingual [English only] supervisors communicate with you?

A: That is why I told you that there were some people among us who were bilingual and had experience with the ornaments. And they (the patrones) did not offered them the job. Since these
people knew the work, they would have been able to communicate with us. Also, they knew how the *patrones* wanted the ornaments to be made; they could easily had explained to us the job procedures. But no, they always went out and hire people who did not speak Spanish and who did not know how to make the ornaments. I think that was discrimination. They thought that a Latino person could not do a supervisory job. Because the woman who did the *masa* (dough) was bilingual, Lupe, who did not speak perfect English, but she spoke it better than some of us. She was always interpreting for the *patrones*. And, the *patrones* always exploited her badly and she never was a supervisor. The reality is that the *patrones* used her because they saw that she always went along with their demands. From the very beginning she was against the union. She always said that she made more money than us, but we never saw her pay check. So, I could not believe that for sure. When we asked to see her pay stub, she always argued that the patron ordered her not to show it to us.

Q: Going back to the picket line and the problems you had at home. Some women had mentioned that they had problems with their husbands because of all the changes in their lives. How was your situation at home?

A: I also had that problem because my husband told me that we were wrong thinking that the problems were going to be solved immediately. We had financial problems. You know that many times the problems between couples is due to the lack of money.

Q: What did you do when you saw time going by, and the strike was not over. What steps did you take to pressure the *patron*?

A: Like you said, as time went by. People started leaving. They became disillusioned because the majority of us thought the strike was going to be a "piece of cake"—that we were going to solve all problems fast and easy. And after all, we had a very difficult experience.

Q: Did you think the strike was going to be a "piece of cake" or the strike was presented to you as a "piece of cake"?
A: Maybe it was presented to us like that, or maybe we misunderstood them (meaning Alicia [Sanchez] and Newman [Strawbridge]. Because as I told you, we never...I personally, had never participated...I had never been a member of a union. I had never participated in a strike, nothing like that. I did not know anything, and I think that the majority of my companeros were in the same position. They thought that our problems were going to be solved overnight. But we never reflected, the union organizers and us, about the obstacles that we could find during the strike. We never thought that the patron could hire as many people as he wanted. Even if he could only have hired 10 people, from those 10 people, 5 people could have stayed working; they could have been trainable. We never thought about or discussed that.

Q: What happened when your companeros started leaving? What did you do in your meetings with Alicia and Newman?

A: Sometimes they gave us strength and encouragement. Later on, they told us --because we started questioning them-- why the patron was hiring people and why we were not able to do anything about that. They explained to us that here [in the United States] the labor laws do not support the worker. The laws of the United States always support the patrones. So, we became even more disillusioned, and some members of the union started looking for jobs. You know that two or three months without working is very difficult for people, especially for the couples who worked there. One of them had to go out and look for work, either one of them, the man or the woman. But they had to earn at least one income. It became clear in those meetings that people started questioning our tactics. There were members who were very upset. Many of them did not go to the meetings any more.

Q: What happened when people complained in the meetings? What avenues did you take to solved the problem or the strike?

A: As I told you, many companeros got frustrated and sought jobs. In reality Alicia and Newman were not able to do anything because they said that the California laws did not support the workers only the patrones, that there was nothing we could do. We
could not stop the patron from hiring people. The government could not force him not to hire other people. There was nothing we could do about it.

Q: When you voted and decided to go on strike, was everything explained to you in detail by the union organizers? The situation with the scabs, the fact that your union did not have a monetary fund, that the strike could last more than two weeks, etc. Was everything explained to you?

A: Well, maybe it was explained to us, but maybe we did not understand it. As I mentioned, we never had an experience like that. And maybe they explained it to us but not in detail. But since they [Alicia and Newman] were the union organizers, they had experience in union organizing, and maybe they had experience on strikes. If they knew that our union was newly formed, our union was of course, a weak one --Not a strong union. We did not have monetary funds. We did not have anything. They should have recommended to us that it was not the best time to go on strike. They were the ones with experience.

Q: Do you think that if things were better explained to you, or maybe other Mexican workers with union-organizing experience came to your meetings and talked to you about the benefits and consequences of a strike. You would have reach the conclusion not to go on strike at that specific time or that you could have waited until October to take those steps?

A: Oh, yes, definitely. If we had had people with union organizing and strike experience talking to us, we could have waited until October.

Q: Other people say that you inexperience was a factor. But also the fact that the patron was a hard head?

A: Oh yes, the patron was a man that did not reason with anybody. According to him, he was always right, and his word for him was God's word.
Q  Were you part of the negotiating committee?

A: Yes.

Q  During the strike, how many times did you sit to negotiate with the patron?

A: I went only one time, but the others went two or three times during the week.

Q  How did you see the negotiations -- from your side and from the patron's side? Do you think you were well prepared to negotiate?

A: What I saw was that the patrones did not talk to us. They always talked to the union representatives; Alicia and Newman. In that case they were representing us. But, he had the responsibility to negotiate with us because we were his workers, not the representatives.

Q  Were you able to understand what they were talking about?

A: I understood some words.

Q  Do you think you were well represented? When you decided to go on strike, did you all sit down together, to write a contract proposal? Or did the patron come first with a proposal? If he came first, did you review it, accept or reject it?

A: I do not remember if we wrote a contract first, or if it was the patron. But I think we wrote it first.

Q  Who wrote it?

A: Alicia and Newman, of course. They asked us what we wanted and they wrote it.

Q  What did you want in a contract?
A: We wanted to be paid fairly. We did not want any more wage cuts. We wanted paid vacations according to our piece rate wage. And we wanted more than a week because they paid us only one vacation week at $5.00 an hour, regardless of how much money we made in piece rate. We also wanted health insurance for our family and sick days. We had several paid holidays.

Q Were you in the meeting when you and the patrones agreed on a contract and the time you could go back to work?

A: I do not remember because the last month of the strike, I was working. I remember that the patron gave an ultimatum. He said that if we wanted to return to work, we could do it. If not, we were going to lose our work. I remember that because later on we were interviewed by the man from the Press Democrat [Alvaro Delgado was a Press Democrat staff person and he covered the history of the union]. I was interviewed, and I told the news that the patron had squeezed our neck, that he had pressured us to return to work, since he gave us that ultimatum: If we did not go back to work...I do not remember if he gave an exact day to return to work, but he said that if we did not go back to work, we were going to lose it.

Q How did people feel about going back to work under such pressure?

A: The spirits were not high. People felt depressed because we spent many months without working, with problems in the house. Women had problems with their husbands and men had problems with their wives. We all had financial problems, and we did not achieve everything we wanted. So we did not go back to work in good spirits.

Q Where you present when Paulina Martinez was accused of hitting the woman guard with her picket sign?

A: No, I was not there. I went with others to take her out of jail. A group of workers went to release her. She was very hurt, and so were we. We all hugged each other, and we told her that we
were going to continue in the struggle, that we were not going to stop. She said the same. It was a very sad thing to happen in addition to the hard times we all were going through. However, we always had each other's support. Even when the patron did things that hurt us a lot, we got even more united. His tactics, instead of separating us, were uniting us even more.

Q: Some workers had mentioned that there were two workers that were working for the patron, and that...Tell me what you think?

A: Yes, those workers never shared...maybe at the beginning...they were close friends of Alicia, and they were also close friends with Lupe Farias. So they were close to the two sides. The reason we thought they got involved in the union is because they felt forced by their friendship with Alicia. That is why we thought they got involved in the union. They wanted to get the best from both sides. They thought: "If the union wins, we gain benefits." If we lost, they wanted to secure their job through their friendship with Lupe Farias. Even the patron (during the strike) smiled and talked to them, and he never talked to us. We suspected them of giving information to Lupe. We felt they told Lupe about our plans. In our meetings we blamed Lupe for many of the problems, and they defended her. They said that she did not know what was happening. There was even a picket line right outside Lupe's home, and they did not go. So, they were playing both ends.

Q: What happened when you decided on tactics, and the patron did something totally different in advance?

A: Yes, we told Alicia several times, not very openly, but we told them that information was getting to the boss. We meant Alicia and Uriel Caballero. And Alicia did not believe us. It is not like she said; "I do not believe it." But, we saw that she did not believe us. There were people who confronted her directly, and she did not do anything about it. Let me tell you somethin: I am not
going to say that Alicia was even to all of us. If I wanted to talk to her, she listened to me. She found the time to listen to us. But, she could not believe that Alicia and Uriel could be telling the patron about our plans.

Q: How did you, the workers, and Alicia and Newman explain to yourselves the fact that the patron knew what tactics you were going to take in advance?

A: We did not know, I personally had my doubts that they were giving information to the patron. I think Alicia Caballero called Lupe and gave her information, but I cannot prove it because I never saw or heard it directly. Even when we went back to work, Lupe did not talk to anybody but Alicia and Uriel Caballero. She [Lupe] only talked to us the minimum related to work.

Q: Well, she was probably very angry at all of you because, during the strike, you organized a march right outside her house. And, also, you yelled at her when she went in and out of the shop?

A: Yes, we had a rally outside her house and the majority of the community who helped in the picket line screamed terrible things at her. Things that...They screamed horrible things to see if she would stop working. But, she never stopped working.

Q: Sara, how was it for you the first day you went back to work?

A: I will tell you. The first day of work for me...I even got sick. My stomach hurt all day because the atmosphere was horrible. People looked very bad at us. Nobody talked to us and we, well in reality when I went back to work, I did not feel embarrassed, let me tell you. I was very proud because I went back to work. I did not take anybody's work away. The opposite is true for them. They made our struggle harder because, if they would have supported us, we could have achieved faster what we wanted. But nobody
supported us. I did not feel bad because of the people inside, I felt bad about the way the patron forced us to return to work. Because he said: "If you do not return to work, you will not have it any more."

Q When you went into work, did you sit in your regular places, were you used to sit before, or did you have designated places?

A: No, we sat in the places that were vacant, because the majority of the people who were working had their places already. But, I remember that they left one side of the shop for us.

Q Was that better for you -- to be all together?

A: I felt fine because maybe that was the company's plan. They did not want for any of us to be close to the scabs because we were outside, and we were very frustrated about the whole thing. Maybe that was a way for them to prevent any fights, but we never planned to attack physically any scabs.

Q Maybe it the *patrones* did not want you to talk to the scabs. The *patron* probably thought that inside you may change the scabs' minds about the union?

A: Maybe was that, because nobody talked to us. It was prohibited for them to talk to us.

Q Do you remember about Javier and Rosario? Her sister continued working during the strike?

A: Yes Lupita. She did not care about her sister Rosario being outside on strike, and she kept on working. She never wanted to be part of the union.

Q When you went back, I understand that you, Mario, Rafael and somebody else got the worst ornaments. How was that?

A: They always looked for ways to attack us through the work. The company was designing new ornaments every day --harder
ones-- and the pay was not good. So, they [the patrones] were
giving them to us hoping that we would grow tired and quit.
Because they wanted to get rid of us. They did not want to
recognize that we were good workers; we worked fast and good.

Q What did you do when you got those kinds of ornaments? Did you call the union and talk to Alicia and Newman?

A: There was nothing the union could do about it. We had several
problems because we made $ 20.00 some days; some days we made
$ 12.00. So the situation was very hard. Later on, new orders came
and the patron knew that the new people could not do the work. So
he had to give the orders to us. However, he gave the orders to only
two or three people, not to everybody. The scabs, and the people
who were on their side kept making certain ornaments for months.
Good ornaments, from which we made up to a $ 100.00 a day, the
scabs received those ornaments for months, which means that they
could make the same ornament for several months and always make
more money than us.

Q When you went back to work did the patron fire all the scabs
or did he keep some?

A: He kept all the scabs. There was work for everybody. Later
on, the people who left, left because they wanted to. One time an
Asian guy told us that “he understood what we were fighting for,
and that we were fighting for something good,” but that he had
plans not to stay in that company-- He said that he “was going to
school to find a better job.” In fact several people working there
told us that they understood our struggle, but they probably were in
great need to work.

Q I understand from other workers that you were getting the
worst ornaments, in terms of how hard it was to make them and
how little the patrones paid for them. They said that that is how
you hurt your hands. Is that true?

A: What happened is that they always attacked the people who
were more active in the union, and I was one of them. So, that was
the way the patron attacked the most union active people. The way he did it to me was by giving me difficult to make ornaments, and the massa (dough) was very hard. I told Lupe to fix it for me. And she always said: "Leave it there, when I have time I will fix it." Since I was not working by the hour, but by piece rate, I could not waste any time. I fixed my own massa by hand. That affected my health tremendously. Physically my hands were hurt. My back ached a lot, my waist, too. Everything. I started going to the doctor because my hands got very swollen. I could not close my hands. The doctor told me that my tendons were swollen. My doctor even told me to talk to my supervisor; and for me to stop doing that kind of work. So, I talked to my supervisor. At that time, we only talked to the supervisor, we never talked to the patron. The supervisor told me that "if I could not make ornaments, I could no longer work there because they "did not have another position for me." The supervisor told me that in case of an opening, I was going to start making the minimum salary. How could I start working for the minimum? When I had worked there for thirteen years and I was making like $9.00 an hour? I could not start making $4.00 or $5.00 an hour. That was ridiculous! I told the insurance company exactly what my supervisor told me. The insurance did not do anything, but my doctor told me not to work any more because I was working under lots of pain. My doctor gave me time off. When I went back to work, I simply could not work. Finally the company's insurance representative told my supervisor that I could not work and that they should find another job for me to do in the company. A year later, Stephany, the supervisor sent me a letter informing me of a position opening. I did not want to go because I feared them. I was afraid that it was a set-up for me.

Q: Do you remember in what month and year you got sick?


Q: Did you talk to Alicia and Newman about your situation?
A: Yes but nothing was done. The patron gave the excuse that he needed that production and that was it.

Q By the time you went into disability, the union was not helping you at all?

A: That is correct. The company's insurance paid me for two months. Then they said that I was fine to return to work. I was without any income for over four months, until I started receiving disability. I received disability for two years, from 1991 to 1993, when I started working in my new job.

Q When you left Calliope Designs, did you continue having contact with the union?

A: The union was gone by that time.

Q How did you feel inside the shop at the time you were having a difficult time and the union was falling apart?

A: Well, we felt that all our efforts and sacrifices had not been good for anything. It was in vain.

Q I understand that between the middle of 1980 and 1990 the union became part of Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Do you remember when and how you affiliated to SEIU?

A: I did not see any achievements with the affiliation. I did not see any benefits for the union with the affiliation. The workers' problems continued happening as before; we did not have beneficial changes after that.

Q Did you keep in contact with the other workers to find out how they were doing?

A: No, when I left Calliope Designs I became very depressed. I felt very rejected by Calliope Designs because of my sickness. That hurt me a lot, I did not even want to talk to any of my co-
workers. I felt some kind of resentment because some of them said that I was not sick. They said that I only wanted to get money from the company. So, I felt very resentful. Sometimes I would volunteer for the union, or if there was a rally, I would go and support them.

Q Sara, looking back, could you talk about your experiences in the union organizing?

A: Look, one of the experiences I learned about was a union and a strike. First, when I used to look at people being on strike, I had no idea what it was all about. I thought to myself: "Those people are crazy: They are crazy because they do not want to work." Now, when I see people on strike, I truly respect that strike because I know how much those people are suffering. I support them morally if I go by their picket-line because I know what they are fighting for. Another thing I learned: As long as I live, I will never cross a picket line. Maybe before, when I did not know anything about strikes, I could probably have crossed the picket-line due to my ignorance. But now I am changed.

Q How about in your work -- do you relate to your patrones or supervisors in a similar manner as in Calliope Designs?

A: Well look. The place I work for is a place that really cares for the workers. So, when you find a place like that, you cooperate because you see that you generate profits for that place, but you also see that they in return give you decent salaries and benefits.

Q What were the not so positive experiences that you had with the union?

A: At the end the strike, it became very negative, very violent and aggressive. The community that helped us became very aggressive and some of us too. Now I see that as very negative. If I was to participate in a strike again, I would do the opposite. And,
also, I would think about it twice. A strike is a very important decision that cannot be made overnight. We need time to reflect about what we are going to do. By going on strike, we risk our families, our homes our marriages and our jobs.
Point St. George Fisheries workers

Francisca and Salvador Bejar, workers
Point St. George Fisheries

Q: Salvador, where do you come from?
A: I am from Michoacan, Mexico.

Q: Francisca, where do you come from?
A: I am also from Michoacan, Mexico.

Q: Do you remember when you both immigrated to California?

Q: Did you have previous experience with union organizing in Mexico?
A: Salvador: No.
Francisca: I had a little political experience. I worked in the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) office as a secretary. But real experience with unions, no.

Q: Since you worked with the PRI party, did you know about election campaigns, and voting procedures?
A: Yes.

Q: Francisca, when did you start working at Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF)?
A: I started working in April of 1979.

Q: What was your first job?
A: I started peeling shrimp.
Q  Salvador, do you remember when did you start working for PSGF?

A:  I do not remember exactly what month. But I started the same year as Francisca, in 1979. I worked for one year, and then I left temporarily. I worked on the crab floor, and I also cleaned fish in my first job.

Q  Do you remember how much money you were earning?

A:  Salvador: More or less $ 2.75 or $ 3.25 an hour. That was the minimum wage.

Q  Francisca, for how long did you work peeling shrimp before you were moved to the fish fileting position?

A:  After I peeled shrimp, I packed fish. I think I worked in those two positions for several months before I became a fish fileting person. It is not right Chava? [Chava is in Spanish the short name for Salvador] Because that was the time when I married you. I became a filetera seven or eight months after I started working at PSGF. At that time, I started working piece rate.

Q  How about you, Chava, did you always work per hour or piece rate?

A:  My jobs were as follows: Clean crabs, pack the fileteras’ fish, pack orders, and clean fish. I did those jobs in a rotating way. I was never doing one job all day long. Clean fish, fileting fish; big fish that were difficult for women to work with...

Q  Did you always earn the minimum wage?

A:  Well, my salary increased with time. When I stopped working there, I was earning $ 5.75 an hour. After working there for six years!

Q  Salvador, as I understand, work at PSGF was seasonal work. What did you do when you were not working at PSGF.
A: I worked on a ranch, in the field. I was back and forth at PSGF.

Q: Did you always work seasonally at PSGF, and never full time as the others?

A: Salvador: Yes. I only worked for two years consecutively, then I left for a while, and I went back again and I stayed for two years.

Francisca: In 1982, when our son Salvador was born, you were not working at PSGF. It was when the migra (immigration) took everybody away.

Q: When you started organizing the union in March and April of 1988, Francisca, you were already fileting fish for approximately eight years, and you Chava? What were you doing?

A: Chava: I was packing the fileteras' fish. This is how the process worked: 1) A man gave the fish to the filets, 2) the fileteras filleted it, 3) other women cleaned it, 4) and I packed it. So it was a four step process.

Q: How much money were you paid per hour in 1988?

A: $5.75.

Q: Francisca, how much money did you make working piece rate?

A: It was approximately $7.00 to $9.00. But what we have to understand is that sometimes we only worked two to three hours a day. In some days I only made $27.00 a day. And I did not work every day.

Q: What did you do when you were not working fileting fish?

A: Some days we would work in the plant doing something else. We would pack fish, or cleaning salmon, or cleaning crab.

Q: How many women worked fileeing fish?
Francisca: We were approximately twenty women.

Chava: Only in that section, because there were other women on the other side.

Francisca: Yes but let's not count the others because they were being trained. The ones with experience were twenty.

How many people worked peeling shrimp?

A: I do not know for sure, maybe twenty.

How many people worked cleaning crabs?

A: Francisca: There were many more people.

Chava: During the crab season at least forty to fifty women worked there.

Can you tell me about the fish and shellfish seasons?

A: Francisca: For the shrimp it is when it is hot, during the summer. The crab season is during the winter. However, we worked peeling shrimp at the beginning, when we started working there. Later on, they removed the shrimp peeling machines, and we did not peel shrimp.

Chava: Shrimp was packed there, when we received it, it came already peeled from the other plants. We only put it in cans and packed it. I think the shrimp came already peeled from the Oregon Plant. [The company owner had two or three other plants in addition to the plant in Santa Rosa. One in Oakland, one in Bodega Bay, and one in Oregon] We packed it in one or five pound cans.

Francisca: There was fish all year round.

What motivated you to start organizing yourselves into a union?

A: Francisca: We always saw the discrimination that existed between Mexicans and Portuguese. We always heard rumors about the Portuguese people having health benefits, and we? We worked so hard and we did not have any health insurance nor benefits. We were not paid holidays. Chava: We were paid less money than the Portuguese people.
Q So if the company hired a bilingual Mexican worker with experience, did they offer him or her a supervisory position?

A: Both: No, there were not Mexican supervisors. Even if they were bilingual.

Q What was the treatment Mexican people received in that place?

A: Francisca: There was no respect towards us whatsoever. The foreman, Tony de Lima, a Portuguese man was very offensive towards people. He would swear a lot. He would say very strong and offensive words towards the *fileteras* because sometimes the fish did not come out cut the way he wanted it. There was not respect towards the Latino workers. You know that the majority of the workers were Latinos. I do not know exactly how we started organizing ourselves. I think I heard Celia Mendoza talk about...Because once before a black man came to work there. Do you remember, Chava?

   Chava: A Salvadorean man.

   Francisca: He planted the seeds about union organizing, but when the bosses found out what he was doing, he got fired.

Q Do you remember what year it happened?

A: Francisca: I think it was around one or two years before we did, 1985 or 1986. But when they [meaning the bosses] discovered his activities, he was fired immediately. However, the seeds were planted anyhow, Celia, I think, was one of the first ones who started organizing again.

Q Let me go back to the treatment. How were the men treated, Chava?

A: Chava: In relation to men's treatment, it was easier. The foreman did not scream at us as much as he did the women. He would scream but into the air, never directly to another man. He would do it walking by, knowing that he could get into trouble if he insulted one man directly.
Q: Tell me now. How did you start organizing yourselves?

A: Francisca: By word of mouth. We were told about Alicia [Sanchez] and Newman [Strawbridge].

Chava: Before that the male workers held meetings in which we talked and commented about the lack of health insurance and other benefits.

Francisca: I think it is so sad that the Latino people are the poorest in this country. You should have seen, during that year I had my daughter Julieta and my son Salvador. At that time there was not any help for undocumented people. There was not Medi-Cal for us, so we had to pay for everything, we were always so broke, so poor. Chava my husband only worked during crab and shrimp seasons, as well as in the harvest season. We always said how can it be that the Portuguese people have health insurance, better salaries, and better positions and we do not have anything, even though we were the ones doing the work.

Chava: Even at the end of the year, when we received our Christmas bonuses, Mexicans only received one turkey, and the Portuguese people received two turkeys and a can of shrimp. The discrimination against the Latino people was more obvious.

Q: What was the ethnic breakdown in that place? Who were the workers and who were the supervisors?

A: Chava: The majority of the workers were Mexicans. The supervisors were Portuguese.

Francisca: And if there were one or two white people, they were supervisors.

Q: When you started organizing, did you hear about the other group of Mexican workers from Calliope Designs who were already in the organizing process?

A: Francisca: Yes, I think so, because they were already organized.

Chava: Yes, the monitos (ornaments) ones. Francisca: What I remember is that we all agreed that we were going to get together
at Alicia and Newman apartment at Sonoma Avenue. The word of mouth was passed and we all went. The beautiful thing about it is that many people came. We all had hoped to have some changes.

Q It is my understanding that when you wanted to start the organizing process, a women's committee went to talk to Alicia.

A: Francisca: I think that at that time Celia and my comadre had gone to talk to Alicia. I do not remember if I went Laura. I remember the first time we went, right, Chava? We all got together.

Q Alicia told me that she told the committee that if you wanted to organize a union, you had to collect signatures from your other co-workers?

A: Chava: Yes, we signed some cards, I think so. Francisca: I think so Laura. Chava: We signed because I think she [Alicia] wanted to know how many people were interested in a union. After that, the meeting was organized. It was organized by word of mouth.

Francisca: I remember we were a lot of workers because we could hardly fit in that big room.

Q Do you remember what happened in that meeting?

A: Francisca: The only thing I remember is that everybody came out from that meeting with our spirits very high. Everybody felt that we were stepping into paradise. But they told us that it was not going to be an easy organizing effort. They told us that it was going to be hard, the struggle. And as they said; the struggle was very hard.

Q What did you tell Alicia and Newman?

A: Francisca: We said everything to them. We told them about the poor treatment we received; the terrible discrimination against Mexicans. We also discussed the low salaries Mexicans got
in that place. We also told them about the fact that we did not have health insurance. Most of all, we did not get paid holidays, nor paid sick days. We did not get paid anything, anything!

Q: What did Alicia and Newman tell you about organizing a union?

A: Francisca: Well, all that about organizing ourselves. They explained to us very well that if we had over fifty percent of the votes for a union, we won. But if not, we lose. That is why we had to talk very well with all the workers about the union.

Q: What else did they [Alicia and Newman] say about union organizing?

A: Francisca: Yes, Chava: I do not remember very well, but they mentioned many things...that it was not so easy, that we had to support one another, that we had to...since that company was very strong, it was going to be hard.

Q: Did they tell you about the Patron's (company owner) campaign to stop you from having a union? about strikes? its benefits and consequences? etc.

A: Chava: yes, Francisca: yes, I remember they explained all of that. Yes I do remember everything! they told us that when we started the organizing effort for an election, the patron might fire many of us. We were so determined about what wanted to do. Even if the plant got closed and moved to another place. But if that happened we were all going to be f... up, them, the patrones and us, not only us the workers. And as we said! I was so happy, and I think the majority of the workers were very happy. [The plant closed down in 1993].

Chava: The plant already had problems, because the buildings were very old and the owners had problems with the state. The state wanted for them to renovate the buildings. But for them it
was easier to buy, I think they bought a new building near Sacramento, I do not know exactly where, but they moved over there.

Q  Do you think that your union organizing influenced them to move the plant some place else?

A: Francisca: Yes of course, it had a lot to do with it, because they were not receiving as many profits from the Latino labor as they were before we organized ourselves. So it was not beneficial for them to stay open in Santa Rosa.

Q  Do you think that your organizing affected the company's image?

A: Both: Yes, of course.

Q  Lets go back to your first meeting. What was your next step after the first meeting?

A: Francisca: Look, first of all, we had meeting after meeting to organize an election for a union. Chava: What I liked the most, after we all agreed for a union was the fact that would all stop working for a while and walk outside to rally together. Francisca: I think that was during the picket-line period. Chava: We loved it, the majority of the workers used to come outside and rally.

Q  Do you remember when you started organizing yourselves? [April 5, 1988] This was after you all signed the cards for an election. How did you let the patron know that you wanted a union?

A: Francisca: Oh, yes, yes. How much I remember, with how much pride we wore or bandanas around our arms. I think they were yellow. After that we wore buttons and the T-shirts. The buttons were a rose and a hammer and it said: We want a union,
queremos un sindicato. Later, we had our T-shirts. It was all the small fish in a shape of a big fish that was eating a big fish, and it said: organize!

Q Do you remember a big rally outside the plant?

A: Francisca: Yes,
   Chava: Many people helped us, many people went over there.
Francisca: The one we walked inside the plant? Yes that one. I was interviewed by the TV. That was the way we told the patron that we were organizing ourselves, that we wanted a union because there was lots of media there, and other unions came to support us, too. There were lots of white people supporting us. It was all so beautiful, the spirits were so high.

Q What was the answer the patron gave you?

A: Francisca: They did not want to talk to us.

Q What was your next tactic?

A: Francisca: We had the picket lines. When did we have our election Laura? [June 17, 1988]. Since we started organizing ourselves in April, the campaign for an election lasted for over two months.
   Chava: During those two months, we continued wearing the buttons and the T-shirts.

Q I understand that you formed different committees to talk to people in their homes, to inform the community, media, etc. Did you participate in any committees?

A: Francisca: You were secretary of one, do you remember? [Talking to Chava]. I think I talked to people, we also called them on the phone.
   Chava: We talked to people at the plant during lunch time. We would go and eat together, and discuss.

Q Do you remember what were the people's fears for not joining the union?
A: Francisca: Their main fear was to lose their job,
Chava: Yes, they did not want to lose their jobs.

Q How about undocumented people, were they scared?

A: Francisca: It was even worse, for them, although many people had fixed their papers. Both: About fifty percent of the workers were without papers.
   Francisca: Some people without papers wanted a union.
   Chava: Some wanted a union badly.
   Francisca: Their main fear was losing their job and having to go find another.

Q Did they have fears that the patron would call the migra (immigration) on them?

A: Francisca: No.
   Chava: There were some comments about that. Francisca: Not that the patron would call the migra on them because it was convenient for the patron to have illegals there. It is because of their [Mexicans] back breaking labor that they became millionaires.
   Chava: And also some other people.
   Chava: I remember that we would take an hour at lunch break, and go to talk to the workers, we talked to approximately forty workers.

Q What did patron do when you started organizing the union?

A: Francisca: He sent the fish someplace else, and he did not bring fish to this plant. Only once in a while, he would bring fish to Santa Rosa. He took many working hours away from us.
   Chava: Exactly. Francisca: He took hours away from everybody, especially from those ones who were the organizers. Especially the fileteras, because we were the ones who started the organizing efforts.

Q Why were the fileteras the organizers, since you were the group of workers who made more money?
A: Francisca: Yes, we were making more money, but we had the responsibility because we were all Latinos, and we were the ones who got fucked-up all the time. For me the fight was for one and for all. I do not know if you understand. It is true that we were the best paid people there, right?

Q Do you know where the patron was sending the fish?

A: Chava: To Bodega Bay, San Francisco, and Oregon.
Francisca: Simply he did not buy fish. Chava: --talking to Francisca: You know that he sent all the fish to San Francisco. It was packed there, I do not know exactly where in San Francisco, also here in Bodega Bay.
Francisca: Right, the damn patron has a little plant in Bodega Bay. You know what makes me very happy? That the damn man bought a huge house near Stony Point. And now? He has to work as hard as the others. Even now a days, we still savoring our vengeance of them been forced to close their plant in Santa Rosa.

Q What other actions did the patron take during the campaign for the union election?

A: Chava: He closed the door and would not let people go in. They put two to three security guards on each entrance.
Francisca: I remember they did that because sometimes Alicia would go during our lunch break to talk to people. Also some Latinos used to go inside to sell things: tortillas, jewelry, clothes. So in vengeance he kicked everybody out. They did not let any more people to go in and sell stuff.

Q How were you prepared for the union vote?

A: Francisca: Oh Laura, you ask me these questions at this time many years after? I do not know. All I remember is that Alicia prepared us. She taught to us how to vote, how the voting ballot would look like. She did all that because there were even people who did not know how to read and write.
Q: What happened when you had your election? [June 17, 1988]
Do you remember what were the election results? [157 voted yes for a union, and 20 against]

A: Francisca: No. I do not remember. Yes because some people -the Portuguese woman, the foreman, took some women out to lunch, according to her to celebrate the defeat of the union. And what a surprise! We won by a big margin.

Q: How were your spirits after you found out that the union was not being recognized by the company?

A: Chava: Of course, people felt bad. Many people were tired already.

Q: How were you prepared by Alicia and Newman about the possibility of the company not recognizing the union?

A: Francisca: Well, they told us everything. I admire Alicia and Newman very much, especially when they were married. Because Newman was a very respectful man, and he always gave us courage to continue the struggle. They gave us the tools to learn how to defend ourselves. I think many people learned how to defend themselves in their lives.

Chava: I think the same way, many of us opened our eyes to reality even more. We awakened to our rights. Many of the people working at PSGF presently have better jobs.

Q: What happened after you won the election. Did the company recognize the union as the collective bargaining?

A: Both: No. Chava: some people got laid-off because there was not enough fish.

Francisca: They [the bosses] simply said that there was no fish. It is gone --bye bye.

Q: What actions did the union, or you the workers take about that?
A: Francisca: One time --talking to Chava, what did we do dear? When they laid-off people, what did we do? We did the picket line.

A: Chava: Yes, we used to go outside and did a picket-line.

Q: Do you remember that the company made over 65 complains about the way the election had been handled by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and by the way the workers carried out the campaign for election?

A: Chava: Yes I remember, I went to testify. [Mr. Bejar and other workers were accused of pressuring other workers to vote for the union. They were also accused of saying things to white and Portuguese supervisors]. I remember now. Yes, as I told you previously. We used to get together and talk among ourselves. So I went to testify. We were approximately ten people, men and women. The company lawyers asked us questions about the campaign for the union election, then Mr. Neil Herring our lawyer asked us different questions. At the end we proved that we did not insult nor threatened the white and Portuguese supervisors.

Q: I understand that you had to buy the equipment you worked with --boots, knives, knife sharpeners, aprons, and gloves? Do you remember that the union lawyer, Mr. Herring sued the company for forcing you to buy protective gear they were supposed to provide to you?

A: Francisca: Yes, but after we won a contract, they had to buy everything for us.

Q: How was the community support during all this time? first you had the campaign for an election. Then you had the picket lines protesting the company sending the fish to another plant? What was the community's role in all of these activities?

A: Francisca: The community support was fantastic!
Chava: We had support from all the communities! Francisca: The largest support we received came from the white community.

Q: How about the Mexican community?
A: Chava: They helped us a lot, they were always there.
Francisca: People from all over came to support us: Family, friends, and people we did not even know. They supported us in the picket lines and in the marches. You could see the people carryng banners, and signs.

Q Your union was not recognized by the company until July 21, 1989. How did people feel during that year?

A: Francisca: Many people felt like everything we had hoped for and battled for was evaporating. They felt like they did not want to continue in the struggle. Can you imagine? Some of the active people were fired. Those ones who stayed working, our working hours were tremendously reduced. It became very hard to continue in the struggle. But more than anything else we had the spirit to continue the struggle. If we had agreed from the beginning not to stop. We had to continue. Even the people that got fired, they continued coming to support us in the meetings, marches, and the picket lines.

Chava: I left on my own in 1988 when I went to work for the labor operating engineers union.

Q What happened when you were certified?

A: Francisca: I do not remember many things. I do not remember sitting at the table negotiating with Les Mundson, I think Celia Mendoza was in the negotiations committee.

Q Do you remember if you wrote your first contract proposal or if the patron presented it to you?

A: Francisca: I do not know because Alicia was in charge of doing all of that. I do not remember the contract exactly, but I remember that the company started paying us holidays. Some workers received health insurance, but only those ones who worked certain hours a month. We the fileteras never worked many hours, so we did not receive health insurance. The union fought for us to have health insurance, but I think we did not get it. Maybe we got
the one where the company paid 80 percent, and we paid 20 percent. I did not get health insurance for my family because you had to pay for them.

Q: Did you see a change in the working conditions and treatment after the contract was agreed upon?

A: Francisca: Yes, we were treated more respectfully, more like humans.
Susana Garcia, worker,  
Point St. George Fisheries

Q Tell me about your experiences at the plant during the organizing efforts?

A: We suffered a lot, the most active union members experienced terrible treatment from the bosses. We were put to do the worst jobs, the bosses made terrible comments about the union, and they were mean to us. After Alicia left the union, the situation at work became even worst. Cesar, our new union representative from the Local Janitors 87 never provided any services to us. I got hurt at work and never receive any compensation.

Q What experiences did you learn from the union organizing?

A: I learned to see the power of the people united for a same cause. The union helped me a lot. I lost the fear of not being able to do things I had never done before. You know, how people feel when we think we cannot do anything that goes beyond our daily chores. I got courage, strength and a voice to denounce social injustice, the injustice against people. Principally against children, just look at the proposition 187. We went out and protest in the streets against that proposition.
Agueda Gomez, worker,
Point St. George Fisheries
Agueda Gomez, worked at Point St. George Fisheries. First interview. February 24, 1996

Q  Agueda, could you tell me where do you come from?

A:  I am from Jalisco, Mexico.

Q  Had you worked in Mexico before you came to California?

A:  No, never.

Q  Did you have any union organizing experience in Mexico?

A:  No, this was all new to me. This was the first time I became involved in organizing a union.

Q  Do you remember in what year you started working at Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF)?

A:  I started working in 1981.

Q  What was your first job at PSGF?

A:  I started packing fish. I did not start as a filetera (filletter).

Q  For how long did you work packing fish?

A:  I worked packing fish for about a year and a half.

Q  Do you remember how much money you earned per hour?

A:  I do not remember if it was $ 3.75 or more.

Q  When did you start working as a filetera?

A:  I was trained for one year to be a filetera. I got paid per hour rate. After that year, I had the opportunity to move to the fileteras' line, and that is how I started. The only thing is that since we were new in that position, we were at the end of the line.
Q: When you moved to the fileteras' line, did you start earning the piece rate?

A: Yes, when I was moved to the fileteras' line, I got paid by the piece rate.

Q: How much money were you making per piece rate?

A: It depended in the kind of fish and the size. However, we earned more or less $8.00 to $11.00 an hour.

Q: But I understand that you rarely worked more than six hours a day and five days a week?

A: Yes, there were days that we worked only two to three hours a day. Or some days we had to wait for the fish to come, and during that time we worked per hour rate.

Q: Did you show-up to work everyday?

A: No, they called us a day before, or early in the morning, to let us know if there was work.

Q: What was the ratio of hours you worked per week?

A: Well, that was not a lot because there were times in which we worked twenty hours a week, other weeks we worked thirty. But we never worked forty hours a week.

Q: Did you have to buy your protective gear and knives to work at PSGF?

A: The company gave each of us a knife. They had a log of when and to whom they gave knives. They said that we could only receive a knife every two or three months. We could not have new knives before that time. When we received our new knifes, we had to return the used knife. The same system was used to receive aprons. We used to buy the knife sharpener (stone) and the chaira (steel to sharpen knifes). We needed both the stone and the chaira.
I think we had to pay $8.00 to $10.00 for the stone. And the chair cost $20.00 to $25.00. We also had to buy our boots; they cost approximately $20.00, and they lasted like a year.

Q: I understand that Mexican workers received poor treatment from the company's managers and supervisor, is that true?

A: Mr. Toni de Lima was not too friendly. Well, he was always making sure that all the workers were always working, working. He did not like for people to talk, he always wanted to see us like machines; always producing, and producing. I think, is impossible. He needed to be better prepared to be a supervisor. Be nicer to workers because I think that, if there is communication between the workers and the supervisor, the work and the production will have better results.

Q: In addition to him being unfriendly, did he insult the workers?

A: Yes, I heard him some times swearing at workers; he had bad manners and mouth.

Q: Before I continue asking you about the treatment workers received, let me ask you this: How was the racial breakdown in PSGF?

A: The majority of the workers in production were Hispanic, and there were some Portuguese people and some whites. Latino people worked the hardest because they [owners] always favored Portuguese people for the supervisor's job. White people also had different jobs, but nobody worked in production the way we did. They [whites] were always doing things like driving the fork lifts, and they were in the shipment department. So the treatment between Mexicans and Portuguese and whites was very different.

Q: Can you talk more in detail about the treatment you received?

A: Well, we wanted to have equal rights for all the workers at PSGF. We wanted to have the same working hours for everybody,
we wanted for everybody to have equal access to better jobs. We wanted to receive health benefits because we knew that the Portuguese people working there received health benefits. So we asked ourselves: "Why them and not us, too? We wanted equality." That was discriminatory.

Q: Did you have any kind of health benefits?

A: None. If people got sick and did not work, they did not have a salary. We did not have paid holidays. At that place, if you worked, they paid you, otherwise, you made no money.

Q: Since you worked with dangerous equipment, what happened when workers suffered accidents?

A: If we cut ourselves at work, and we did not work for few days, they did not cover any salaries or expenses. Unless a person cut herself very, very bad. Then she was taken to the hospital. If the cut was not too bad, she went to the office and they put a bandaid and a plastic protector on for the finger, and she was sent back to work. If she felt that she was bleeding a lot, she went home. But she did not receive any compensation for that. So, if we saw that the cut was not too bad, we just kept on working because we needed our salary.

Q: What happened when a worker hurt herself quite badly. Was she able to receive workers' compensation?

A: Well yes. But it required a longer process. There were people there [PSGF] who fell down and hurt themselves very badly. And they [owners] got very upset because the workers complained to workers' compensation, and they [owners] denied it. They said that nothing happened there, that nobody hurt himself there. So the burden of proof lay on the worker, even though they could prove from the doctor's visit that in fact, they hurt themselves there. When they [workers] recuperated from their injury, they did not return to work at the company. [Workers] had to leave permanently because the company did not take them back.
Q I understand that before you started your organizing efforts in 1988, there had been in the past, some people who wanted to organize a union. Is that correct?

A: In reality, I do not remember.

Q Agueda, what motivated you to start organizing a union?

A: Well, we were tired because we received terrible treatment, more than anything else. We did not receive any benefits. That is when we, the workers decided to unite ourselves to start a new stage in our lives to have our dreams become alive.

Q Do you remember how you started organizing yourselves?

A: We started in 1988. We knew about Alicia [Sanchez] and Newman [Strawbridge]. We were told that they organized unions and that probably they were able to help us. We were told that, if we were willing to unite ourselves, they could help us. We decided to have a little meeting with them to see if how many people wanted to organize. And we were able to do it.

Q Before that meeting, there was a group of representatives who talked to them. Were you part of that group?

A: Yes. Alicia told us that, first of all, we had to have all the workers in agreement with the union because we had to have the majority of the votes. So we started talking to the workers and the majority...Well we did not find one that could say no. There were some who were a little scared, but as time went by, we continued talking to people to convince them about the union, and we obtained good results. First, we signed union cards, we needed to have more than fifty percent of the workers singing them to make sure we had the sufficient number of people wanting a union, to start an election campaign. When we had collected the cards signed, we had our large meeting with Alicia and Newman.

Q What do you think made people scared of organizing?
A: To lose their jobs, because we knew that the supervisors were going to be unhappy about our organizing efforts. That is why they were scared of losing their jobs. Undocumented people were very scared to lose their jobs because they thought that through the union organizing it was going to be discovered that they were living undocumented in this country.

Q: Do you remember where the first meeting was? And how many workers went to that meeting?

A: It was near Sonoma Ave. And, we were few workers going to that meeting, maybe 20? [Five to six fileteras went to the initial meeting]. That was the fileteras’ meeting. Then, at the second meeting, there were lots of people, we could not even fit in the meeting room.

Q: Do you remember what happened in that meeting?

A: Well, Alicia and Newman were talking to us about what we could do, and what we could not do. They wanted for everybody to agree with everything. They asked if we were willing to go on strike. At the beginning we all said: Yes! But later on, we analyzed things better, and we felt that it was going to be hard for us because if the owners had other companies, they were going to take the fish there. The strike could be too long, and we were going to be tired, we were not going to have any money, and it was going to be difficult to change the strike. So, instead, we decided to have daily picket lines. Alicia and Newman told us that we should always be united and that, the patrones [company owner] were going to tell us, anyway not to join and that they were going to give us a better salary, health benefits, things like that. But this was not going to happen because we had started to organize and they [owners] were not going to agree with the union.

Q: Did they explain to you what it involved to organize a union?

A: Yes, they told us everything. They told us that by having a union we were going to have more protection at work. They said that if we won the election for a union, we could have full benefits.
They also talked about union dues; they said that we had to pay a monthly fee to the union. They also told us that, if we were not able to organize ourselves, we could lose our jobs.

Q. What tactics did you use to inform the patron about your organizing efforts?

A: We wore a button that said: We want a union (Queremos un sindicato). And we wore an arm-band; I do not remember the color, but we wore one. The owners were very surprised when they saw us wearing those things because, they could never believe that we could organize a union.

Q. Before wearing your buttons and arm-bands, you had a large rally outside the plant. [April 5, 1988] Community members and other workers came to support you. Do you remember the purpose of this rally?

A: We wanted to tell him [company manager] about the union. I think about 300 people came to support us--because there were lots of people. The patron did not want to receive us; he closed all the windows and curtains and never came out. Everybody started chanting. Since we did not obtain a meeting with him, we all decided to leave. However, we decided to continue what we started. We were not going to stop just because of that.

Q. What tactics did you use for your campaign for an election for collective bargaining? The union election was in June 17, 1988, two months after you started the campaign?

A: Well, we had weekly meetings and we were always talking about how beneficial the union was for us. We were aware that the patron was telling workers not to vote for the union because, according to him; "was not going to help in anything because before it would [the union] help us, it was going to harm us because we could lose our jobs, and that there was not going to be work at PSGF anymore."

Q. At that time the patron laid-off many people, do you remember? [ As a response to the union organizing efforts, the
patron laid people off immediately after the rally in April 5, 1988—twenty fileteras, fifty fish packers, and 65 workers from other areas].

A: Yes, because there was hardly any work. The patrones were sending the fish someplace else. So it was rare to be called for work because we were working only one or two-part-time days per week.

Q What did you do in the meantime for your campaign?

A: We had picket lines. We each chose a shift to be outside the plant on the picket line.

Q What did you do for money?

A: We had to tighten our expenses because we only had enough money to pay for our bills and rent. My husband was working, so it was not so bad for me. It was bad for couples that were employed at PSGF! However, we organized ourselves into committees to request food and monetary donations to help people who were hurting the most. That helped them a little because when the couple worked there, it was more difficult for them. For some of us—it was easier economically because our husbands worked full time someplace else. My husband always worked full time, while my wages were reduced to almost nothing. Even though it was hard, I always wanted to continue in the struggle.

Q Can you discuss more about the picket line?

A: We started around 7:00 a.m. We were there approximately two hours. Then, some other people took over. We did all this because we never wanted to leave the picket line alone.

Q What else did you do to prepare yourselves for the election?

A: We had weekly meetings, and Alicia and Newman prepared us for the election. They explained to us what to do in an election.

Q Do you remember how the election day was?
A: Yes, because they [National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)] set up some little booths for people to vote silently. We were supposed to vote without anybody looking at our ballots. I had to show my Identification when I went inside the plant. The *patrones'* observers were there, maybe to make us nervous, but they did not say anything to us.

Q: Do you remember what the vote results were?

A: I do not remember but the difference was large [137 workers voted in favor and 20 against the union].

Q: What did you do after the election?

A: We felt very happy, but I am not sure if we had a celebration right after.

Q: What did you do when you knew about the company appealing to the NLRB to overrule the election?

A: I do not remember what happened exactly. [The company filed close to 60 objections against the union election. Most of them were against the NLRB and how its officials carried out the election].

Q: Do you remember what the union did to keep the spirits up while the NLRB decided to approve or overruled the election?

A: Well, everything was in suspense because, in terms of work it was relatively the same. We hardly had any work, and we tried to do our best because we wanted the benefits. But, the long waiting was demoralizing to people. We did not have any more picket lines.

Q: Do you remember about the union having a class-action against the company for charging you for the protective gear?

A: Yes, but I do not think we received a retroactive pay. However, if we got paid, I do not remember receiving any money.
I left PSGF in 1989 because I was very tired of having work only once or twice a week. I needed to bring more money to my house, so I started looking for another job. At that time, I started cleaning houses and taking care of children. I was making more money doing those two jobs because I had more working hours. I did not keep in contact with the union. I truly became detached from the union because I was very busy with my new job and my children. All I knew was that the union was approved, but it really did not matter because people continued not having enough hours to work. [Workers received retroactive money on May 1, 1990. Approximately 700 workers received from $1.00 to $200.00 in reimbursement for the prior expenses in protective gear. This was a bust to the workers' morale. In July 21, 1989, the union was certified by the NLRB, and negotiations started shortly after that].

Q: Anything else you would like to say about the union?

A: Well for me, it was a beautiful experience because we have to be united if we want to better ourselves. We know that if we come to this country it is because we want to progress. So, I think the union was great for us because we were united, and we became triumphant, even though at the end, everyone found different jobs or something else. However, it was a good experience for our future. If we decided to become involved in another union, well, we would be better prepared. The union helped me, personally, because I understood that we have to better ourselves, and not stay in one job for life. The union helped me to realize that I also have rights in this country.

Q: If you were to have another opportunity to become involved in a union, would you participate again?

A: Yes! [Agueda and her husband have become very successful. She has a small house cleaning business, and her husband opened a Mexican Restaurant].
Julieta Martin Del Campo, worker
Point St. George Fisheries

Julieta Martin Del Campo emigrated from Jalisco, Mexico in 1975, and started working for PSGF in 1978 packing fish. Del Campo is a very frank and strong woman. She has worked in the fish-processing industry for approximately eighteen years. Although she feels that working with fish is difficult, Del Campo continues working in this industry because she earns more money than in any other industry.

Q Julieta where do you come from?
A: I am from Guadalajara, Jalisco. Mexico

Q Did you work in Guadalajara?
A: Yes, I worked as a secretary in a government institution.

Q How many years did you work for that institution?
A: Four years approximately.

Q What did you immigrate to California?
A: In 1975.

Q When did you start working at Point Saint George Fisheries? (PSGF)
A: I started working at PSGF around 1978.

Q What was your first working assignment?
A: I packed fish first, and when the patron, [company owner, or company manager] Manuel De Lima saw that I was very active, he put me on cleaning the offices. I continued cleaning the offices about a year. At that time, I separated from my husband, and of course, I had extra financial needs. I asked the patron for a loan
because I needed money to feed my children. He said to me: "You know what, Julieta? You are a very active person, so I am going to help you." At that time, he started teaching me how to be a filetera (fillet). This was around 1980. I was trained for about six months. I stayed in the training section because there was not an open spot in the filetera line. Only when a filetera missed work for whatever reason, Manuel De Lima would assigned one of the training women to filetear (fillet). A woman was promoted to the filetera line when somebody retired or resigned from the company. I do not know if a person left or retired, but I was finally promoted to the filetera line.

The fileteras with more experience were at the beginning of the belt, and the ones with least experience were at the end of the belt. The fileteras stationed at the beginning of the belt, had the privilege to chose the best fish to work with. The fileteras at the end of the belt got what was left.

Q: When you were packing fish, were you paid by the hour or piece rate?

A: I was paid by the hour.

Q: How much money were you earning by piece rate?

A: Well, look I think I was making a little more than before. Because, at that time we were paid $ 3.75 per hour. And, by working piece rate, our checks showed that we made close to $ 5.00 or $ 6.00 an hour. And, for that time, it was lots of money. We were making close to $ 40.00-$ 50.00 a day.

Q: How were your wages in comparison to other workers?

A: Well, much better because, at that time, I started working in a cannery, and I did not last. I realized that I made more money working at PSGF than in a cannery. So, I stayed there.

Q: I understand that fileteras seldom worked the regular forty hours a week.
A: No, there was not need to work forty hours. During the season we worked more than forty hours a week. Even when it was no the season, we always had work because the company usually had to supply fish to customers.

Q: Did you pack fish when there was no fish to filetear?

A: Yes, I worked in the salmon area, or I packed fish. But, when I worked in those areas, I was paid by the hour.

Q: What was the ethnic breakdown?

A: Well, you know that work related to fish is very tough. It is absolutely under-paid, so the people working in this industry, are going to be the undocumented Mexicans. Because they (bosses) try to f... us with hours, work, with everything!

Q: I know this is hard to answer because people do not go around saying: “I am documented, or I am not documented.” But we have an idea who is documented and who is not. In your own estimate what was the percentage of people without “papers” vs. people with “papers?”

A: It was a hundred percent people who had no “papers.” And, they [bosses] knew who did not have “papers”. I did not have “papers” either. However, they see your willingness to work, and they take you in. That does not mean that they [bosses] were nice to us. They paid less to people and they [bosses] tried to cheat people in many different ways. Celia, who was the senior worker among us, was always helping people fight for their rights. You woul often see workers arguing about the number of hours they worked because the hours they got paid did not reflect the hours they worked. Celia also helped people requesting protective gear for work, she was always helping us. She helped fileteras a lot because we knew how many pounds of fish we filleted, and at the end of the day, they said that we filleted less pounds. When they weighed the fish you filleted, they always said that you did at least two to three pounds less. Do you know how much money that was? At least $10.00 each pound that they wanted to cheat away
from us. Of course, all the supervisors were Portuguese, and the
general manager was white. The bosses were Portuguese. And, of
course, Mexicans were the ones in production.

Q: How were the working conditions in terms of safety?

A: Well, we had good insurance. I had a few accidents in which I
cut my fingers, and they paid my days and took me to the hospital.
Some people hurt their backs, and the bosses took care of them.

Q: What kind of insurance are you talking about? It is my
understanding that you did not have health insurance coverage.
Other workers have also told me that safety in the working place
was not that good. Workers needed to be cut severely to be taken
to the hospital. And, unless you made a workers compensation
claim, the company did not pay you for the days you did not work,
even if it was a work accident.

A: I meant workers compensation. Well, let me tell you. Fish is
very delicate. Fish packers did not use sharp knives. They used
knives but not sharp ones. So, if there was an accident among fish
packers, it was because of the fish spines. The people who
suffered more serious accidents were the fileteras. If I cut myself
and did not work for two days, I did not get paid. If I did not work
for more than three days, and it was a work related accident, I
needed to comply with workers compensation to have a percentage
of my wages paid to me.

Q: How about the sanitary conditions?

A: Well, at the beginning, when I started working there, it was
dirty. There were not good sanitary or safety working conditions.
The company did not have good floor mats to protect us from
falling down. Instead, they spread salt on the floors. According to
them, salt prevents floors from being slippery. Later on, the use of
salt on the floors was prohibited by the city because people
continued falling down. However, you know that working with fish
cannot be very clean because fish is very slippery anyway. So it
was impossible for the place to be absolutely clean. Fileteras had
to work very fast. We had no time to place all the fish waste properly in the garbage can. We just threw fish skin, spines, bones, heads, etc., on the floor. The company did not provide protective gear, and many people did not have the means to buy boots, aprons, gloves, and hair nets. Many people were often accepted to work in regular shoes. There were not strict rules in terms of protective gear. Lupita, our supervisor was very nice to us. She saw our need to work, so she allowed us to work with regular shoes, even though she knew she was going to have problems with her foreman.

In terms of papers, [green cards] she helped us a lot. When immigration came to raid the place, she would always tell us as much in advance as she could. She called us at our houses to tell us not to go to work because the immigration officials continued surrounding the place for a few days.

Q: According to you safety and sanitary conditions were not that bad.

A: Well, the thing that I have never liked and, I never buy, is fish. Because if you are a filetera, you know when fish is fresh and when it is spoiled. I say this because on many occasions, I filleted fish that was already spoiled, with worms, and it smelled terrible. Even so, we had to fillet it, and we had to use a chemical to kill the worms and take away the smell. That has always stayed in my mind. I never buy fish from any store, never. I do not know what other companies do about fish, but I only eat fish that I have filleted because, in that way, I am sure it is fresh.

Q: Was it common for fish to come already spoiled? What did the patrones do when fish came spoiled?

A: The patrones knew exactly when the fish was spoiled. They knew it very well. However, as you said, we were fileteras, and we were being paid by piece rate. To some extent, we did not care if fish was spoiled. Also, we did not have the power to say: “This fish is spoiled, I am not going to fillet it.” We would be fired. The
excuse they always gave us was that Japanese people buy it for specific dishes. Bosses said that Japanese people liked the blackard and dover fish with worms because that was a sign that it was fresh and fermented.

Q  Moving away from the sanitary and safety conditions, what kind of benefits did you have?

A: We had no benefits. We did not have anything. At PSGF the days you worked, were the days you were paid.

Q I understand that in 1988, fileteras started organizing a union primarily because Manuel De Lima made a filetera night shift and that took away working hours from the day shift fileteras.

A: Look, the night shift came after...Look we were twenty fileteras. And what happened is that we made very good money--up to $500 to $600 a week. What happened is that we saw that packers worked twelve to fifteen hours a day. Because before it all started, [organizing] we started working at 7:00 a.m. and we finish working at 11:00 p.m. The schedule was strange. When there was work, you could work all day long. Or, if you did not want, you work only the hours you wanted to work. Nobody forced you to work more hours if you did not want to.

We did not like the fact that we were making lots of money, and fish packers were making very little money. So, some of us agreed to start organizing the union. Alicia [Sanchez] and Newman [Strawbridge] were guiding us in what to do to organize a union. Celia was the person who knew about them. Celia also was the one who was always protecting us. Therefore, she started talking to people about organizing a union. And I said: “Yes let's do it.” We were not afraid of anything because it was the patrones who needed us, not us needing them. We felt bad for the other workers. The fact is that when they saw that we were organizing a union, they (bosses) started training other women as fileteras, and set the filetera night shift. [All PSGF workers I had interviewed, as well as, Alicia Sanchez told me previously that fileteras were the first union organizers Manuel De Lima, the plant manager started a filetera night shift. And by doing that, senior fileteras lost
working hours. Ms. Del Campo told me a different story. However, I telephoned workers back, and they re-confirmed what they previously told me. I decided to include Ms. Del Campo version of the events in the interview's transcript, but I do not plan to take this part of the interview into account for the manuscript.

Q. According to you, the filetera night shift came after you began your organizing efforts?

A: Yes, exactly. Marina, the Portuguese supervisor, trained people to be fileteras.

Q. Do you remember your first meeting with Alicia and Newman?

A: Alicia and Newman told us that we needed to talk to the patron to see if he could help the workers. They said that we needed to do this before we started organizing the union. Alicia and Newman gave some cards to people. If they wanted a union, they had to sign them. AS told us what we were going to be doing. They spent lengthy time explaining to us what was going to happen to us. They told us that it was very likely that the bosses were going to take work away from us, maybe they were going to reduce the fileteras' wages. And as they told us, it happened. They told us about all the risks we were going to have by organizing a union. Well, we all agreed. I think it was because we were all excited about it.

Later on, we had some problems, we started having economic problems because the patrones took work away from us. We knew that it was the fish season, and yet, they did not give us work. We knew that they were taking the fish someplace else. They had companies in San Francisco and Oakland. So, they were taking the fileteras from the night shift to San Francisco. The company itself took them in busses to San Francisco, so that they did not have to drive. You can see the extremes they went to to stop us from organizing a union. I knew about it because Marina the Portuguese supervisor was promoting the work in San Francisco, and she was asking other fileteras to go there. Marina knew that people did not have decent cars, or no car at all. That is why they
organized busses to take people back and forth to San Francisco. They never asked union organizers to go to San Francisco.

Before all the organizing started, I used to get along with everybody --supervisors, secretaries, and workers. Remember that I cleaned the offices, and I make friends quiet easy, so everybody knew me. Well, soon after we started organizing the union --and the bosses knew I was one of the main organizers --everybody in the offices, as well as supervisors, stopped talking to me.

Q I am sorry to hear that. But can you explain to me how you organized your picket lines? Was it because work was being taken away?

A: Well, Alicia and Newman gave us the knowledge to organize everything we needed to do. They helped us to make buttons, T-shirts, and other things. Lots of people helped us doing those things. Alicia and Newman told us that if the company was not going to give us what we wanted, we needed to organize picket lines outside the plant. So that is what we did. We started having picket lines every two weeks. Later on, we started having them more frequently until we had them every day.

I think the patron talked to Celia Mendoza, I do not know about what. But Celia talked to Alicia because she [Alicia] was our union organizer. Alicia told us what to do: Stop, or continue the struggle. I do not know what the patron told Celia, she talked to Alicia directly. In terms of the picket line, well we did not have work, so we took turns during the day. Some people cover the picket line in the morning, and others in the afternoon. I think we had the picket line for a week or so.

Q What did you do to pay your bills, since you were not working?

A: Well, let me tell you. I had another job in the evenings, I had always had two jobs. I was working at the Flamingo Hotel in the afternoons, from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. In terms of other people like Celia, I think they did not work, but they did not suffered in terms of money because their husbands were well established in business, or had good jobs. [She is referring to the Mendoza
sisters. Their husbands had their business, or had well paid jobs. However, these were the only workers who had a steady source of income in their households. The great majority of the workers suffered greatly due to the lack of work]. However, we got to a point in which we were getting desperate because we had no money. You know the financial need is too big. Therefore, some of us started moving away from the union. Of course, this was after the union election.

Q: Do you remember the day of the election?

A: I do not remember.

Q: How were workers feeling after the election? You won the election, yet you could not negotiate with the *patron*.

A: Yes, I remember now. Exactly! It is true. First we won the election for the union. Right after the election we had work regularly for approximately fifteen days. I even remember that we had a big party because we won the election. We were also very happy because work was becoming more regular, and we were thinking that we had won, right? And it was completely the opposite. The company "elevated" us for two weeks, and then dropped us off, just like that. After that time, there was no work for anybody. We felt very bad because after the election, we thought that things were going to be better and that they [*patrones*] were going to really help people. We [*fileteras*] did all this organizing not only for us, because we made very good money. But there were no benefits for the fish packers, and all we wanted was to help them.

Q: How were you informed about the company refusing to recognize the union, and fighting on the National Labor Relation Board (NLRB) level?

A: Yes it is true, they fought with us in those levels. We started hearing rumors that the company was planning to declare itself bankrupt. I was the kind of person that, when I heard all of that, I
removed myself from everything and looked for another job because I had financial needs.

Q: Did you have to testify during the NLRB hearings?
A: No, I did not have to go, but I heard about it because other people were going.

Q: The union was finally recognized in August of 1989.
A: Yes, I remember because they started taking money away from our pay checks. [It is difficult to assess Mrs. Del Campo answer because she left long before the union was recognized. Some of her answers were quite off the reality-wise.]

Q: What happened during the year in which the union election was recognized as legal by the NLRB?
A: I do not know, because I left at that time; I started working in San Francisco in different fish companies. And I never returned to work at PSGF, nor did I keep contact with the workers. So, by the time the company closed down in 1993, I was already gone for over three years.

Q: If you were to have another opportunity to participate in a union, would you do it?
A: No. I would not do it. Well, maybe. Before my economic situation was more risky; now I am doing better in terms of money. I, personally, still fight for my rights. But my experience tells me that people say they will fully participate in the union organizing and back-out immediately. Or they say one thing, and later on, change their mind. If we want to change things for good, we all have to participate.

Q: Do you think the union experience helped you to grow personally?
A: Oh, yes, it helps you. What I am trying to tell you, is that we all have to be united all the time. The union was a big experience for me. I think that it was good for me. My eyes were open to reality because we wanted to have a union to help other people. However, it helped everybody, not only those who were making little money. After all, we fileteras did not have benefits either. And let's suppose that the money they were going to take from our pay checks for union dues was nothing compared to all the benefits we were going to gain in exchange. Right now, I am in a union, and it has helped me a lot...

Q: What union is this?

A: It is local 123, from Vacuum Dry, a cannery in Sebastopol. I am never laid-off for more than a few days because, if the company does not call me to work, I call the union, and they place me to work immediately. Right now, I am making $12.00 an hour because I requested to be trained to learn the machines called "equalizers." I have been operating these machines for over a year. I work the night shift, and even though it is hard, I would rather work that shift because they pay you better.

Q: Do you think that organizing the union helped you to get where you are now?

A: I think that if we did not organize the union, we would have continued working at PSGF. But, we would be as ignorant as before. On one hand, I feel that I was better off before because I had always worked for PSGF. To tell you the truth, I have always made good money working as a filetera. It is the job that has given me more money than any other job. Working with fish you earn what you want because it is paid piece rate.

Q: Anything else you want to add?

A: Well, just to get smarter.
Celia Mendoza, worker,
Point St. George Fisheries
Celia Mendoza. Worked at Point Saint George Fisheries. First interview, February 24, 1996.

Q Celia, where do you come from?
A: I am from Tumbiscatillo, a city in the state of Michoacan, Mexico.

Q Did you work in Tumbiscatillo before you came to California?
A: No, I had never worked.

Q Did you have union organizing experience in Mexico?
A: No.

Q When did you start working in Point Saint George Fisheries? (PSGF)
A: I started working in 1968. I do not remember the day, but I remember the month, June, 1968.

Q What was your first job assignment?
A: I was peeling shrimp.

Q Were you paid by the hour, or piece rate?
A: I was paid piece rate.

Q Was this your first job?
A: No, I had worked previously for a month in an apple cannery. I think it was during September of 1966.

Q How long did you work peeling shrimp?
A: I worked peeling shrimp and cleaning crab for about ten years --from 1968 to 1978.
Q: What job did you do next?

A: After I stopped working in the shrimp department, I continued cleaning crab, and I was promoted to the filetera (filletter) position.

Q: What type of wages did you earn when you cleaned crab?

A: Piece rate also.

Q: Do you remember how much money you made for peeling shrimp and cleaning crab?

A: I do not remember how much money I got paid. All I remember is that we got paid by the pound.

Q: But you may remember this: When you compared your wages with your friends or sisters, were your wages higher or lower than theirs?

A: I made very good money: we received good wages by contract [piece rate].

Q: During those ten years, did you work forty hours a week?

A: No, sometimes we worked up to forty, sometimes more. But usually we worked less than forty hours.

Q: When is the shrimp season?

A: The shrimp started in May, around the middle of May. And it ended around the middle of August.

Q: What did you do between August and May?

A: There were some other jobs people could do. Although they [the company] did not call me a lot because I only worked peeling shrimp. But, when they called me, I worked re-packing shrimp that was already packed in large cans. These cans were packed in the San Francisco plant. Our tasks were to empty the large cans, wash
the shrimp, and packed it in smaller bags or cans. When I did this job, I was paid by the hour. Around June, the salmon season started, and I would clean salmon also.

Q: When you started as a *filetera*, were you one of the first *fileteras* in the company or were there other women working previously?

A: Oh no! There were some other ladies who were *fileteras* for a long time before I became one. These ladies were Italians who came all the way from Bodega Bay to work in the Santa Rosa Plant.

Q: How did you communicate with them?

A: We had no communication because I did not speak English, nor Italian. At that time, when I began working at PSGF, discrimination was bad. There were not many Mexicans working as *fileteras*. In fact, I was the first Mexican who was promoted to the *filetera* line. I was new in the *filetera* line and a Mexican! The ladies felt threatened and said terrible things to me. I never said anything back to them because I did not speak English, and I do not like to fight. However, I could feel their anger. They got very angry when I was called to work, and they were not.

Q: How was the ethnic breakdown when you started working at PSGF?

A: Discrimination was worse! There were many Mexicans, the majority of the workers were Mexicans. There were also Portuguese, American Indian, Italian and a few white --one or two. Whites worked one or two months and they left. They did not last.

Now, when I started working at PSGF, the majority of the *fileteras* were Italian. Later on, when I began as a *filetera*, the company hired many Mexican women to train them as *fileteras*, five or six. Later on, they hired some more Mexicans to work as *fileteras* also. Once in a while, they would hire one or two white women, but they did not last. American Indian women did last working as *fileteras*. 
Q: Can you talk about the discrimination you mentioned previously?

A: There was discrimination, but I did not feel it a lot. Well, they offended you for little things. And they would call you “wetback” for no reason, regardless if you had or did not have your papers. Like myself, at that time, I already had my papers. They would scream at us things like: “You have no papers.” ‘Wetback’ this or ‘wetback’ that.” But no, that was the only kind of discrimination we experienced. The people who called us wetbacks were the ones working in production, like the Portuguese, Italians and American Indians.

Q: How about discrimination coming from the supervisors or the patrones?

A: No, we did not receive any discrimination from them.

Q: How big was the company?

A: Very big. From the time I started working there, it was very big, bigger than when we organized ourselves. At that time, we peeled and packed shrimp and cleaned salmon, other fish no. We started fileting much more fish later on, when I became a filetera. We also cleaned and packed crab. During the shrimp season there were close to 150 people peeling shrimp. At the end of the season, people were laid off, and only workers who had been there longer stayed cleaning salmon. Some women cured it with salt and packed it. Some of us assisted them packing it. Italian women always worked; they were never laid off.

Mexican men cut the salmon because it was very difficult for women to cut. The salmon bones are very tough and women did not have the strength to cut it. Salmon is also very delicate, if you do not cut it right, it flakes all over.

Q: When you started as a filetera, how many Italian women were working there?

A: There were about four or five—all of them older. One was a little younger, and all of them were relatives. They were
sometimes offensive, but not really bad. The ones who were very
discriminatory and offensive were the American Indian women.
They were very offensive and moody. One of them had a terrible
foul mouth, and I had to protect myself from her all the time. Once
we almost got in a physical fight because I had enough of her
offending me.

You know, we worked by contract, and they were very envious
if we worked faster and made more money. They used to say
things like we “took the bigger fish,” and things like that. So when
we got-off work, the most aggressive one was already waiting for
the Mexicans in the bathroom to offend us. Finally one day I told
her: “If you do not keep quiet, I am going to complain about you in
the office.” And, I did it because I could not stand her any more.

Q How many Mexicans were working as fileteras at that time?
A: In 1968, there were no Mexicans working as fileteras. In
1978, when I started, six other Mexicans were trained as
fileteras also. That job was very hard and delicate. We had to
work with knives, and we were trained only one month. After that,
we worked per contract.

Q Who trained you? The Italian women?
A: No! There was an Italian man who trained us. He was a very
nice person.

Q How were your wages in comparison to your friends?
A: They were much higher. That is why I am still working in
this business, because I cannot see myself working some place
else. Now I am working per hour; they pay me $ 9.00, which is
comparable to how much I would make by contract. When the
company closed, later they opened a small shop in Bodega Bay, and
they asked me to work per hour. They just offered to pay me $ 6.50
an hour. Of course, I said “No, I do not work for that money” --
because the job is hard, you always have to be working with very
cold water, so that the fish does not spoil. Then, they offered me
$ 9.00 an hour.
Q: In 1978, ten years after you started at PSGF what was the ethnic breakdown? And, what jobs did Mexicans hold?

A: Mexicans continued being the majority of the workers. And, we always got the worst jobs. Mexicans had to work the hardest. Mexican men had to pack frozen fish all day long. Mexican women helped the men pack the frozen fish to be sent to other places.

Q: Who were the foreman and supervisors?

A: At that time the supervisor was Joe Day, an Italian man. My foreman was a Portuguese man. He was a brother of the man -- Tony de Lima. I am still working for him. His name is Manuel de Lima. However, there was never a Mexican supervisor or foreman. Many years later, a Chicana, Lupe Ojinaga, became a supervisor. Both of us were hired at the same time; we cleaned crab together. She was a supervisor for approximately ten years. Lupe was a very nice supervisor, but the others were very mean. All the other supervisors were Portuguese, Italians or white. There was a Black woman who started working as a filetera at the same time I did. Later on, she became a supervisor, and she was terrible towards the workers! You should have seen how she was before she was a supervisor! She was very nice. But, when she was promoted to a supervisory position, she became awful. She always resorted to physical punishment when a worker made a mistake. Can you believe that she always wanted to hit the workers! Once she hit a young Mexican man with a chaira (a sharpening stone), and the man was fired because the managers believed her that she did not hit him.

Q: I understand that before the organizing of 1988, there was a man who wanted to organize you. Can you discuss that?

A: Yes. I do not remember the year it happened. His name was Tony, and he was from El Salvador. He was bilingual, and he was a supervisor. Even though he was a supervisor, he wanted to organize the workers. He told us: “Look, they are offering everything to me (meaning benefits). I am new; you have been working here for years, and you do not ask for anything. You have to protect yourselves. It is not fair what is happening to you.” He said that
to us when he started working there. He said that we “should have a union” and gave us cards to sign. He tried to support us; he wanted for us to open become aware of our rights. However, when management found out, he was fired. There was also another occasion between 1971 and 1972. A Portuguese woman wanted to organize a union, and she was also fired. After that, we did not do anything.

Q: How was the work situation during those years, before you started organizing the union? (1988)

A: That is why we started organizing a union because, at that time, the working conditions went from bad to worse, and they were not giving us work. They (the owners) made a *filetera* night shift, and I told them not to make the night shift because there was not enough work for everyone (meaning *fileteras*). --I defended myself, because I have always defended myself, right? Then Les Mundson, the general manager, told me; “Do not worry, Celia, there will be enough work for everyone”. But, it was not true. Soon enough, he was giving more work to the night shift than to us, the ones who had more seniority. He said that there was merchandise that needed to be ready to leave very early in the morning. His excuse was that we only worked during the day time, so he could not supply the orders he needed in early morning.

Q: Did he ask you to work at night time?

A: Yes, he asked us if we wanted to work the night shift. So I replied back to him; “Are you going to give my regular number of hours?” He simply said; “No, after all, I changed my mind. Women working the morning shift are not to work the night shift”. I do not know why he did that, because he put all new *fileteras* to *filetear* (fileting) during the night shift. That is why we started organizing the union because they were leaving us without work. I think that shift had been operating close to a year before we finally did anything. They were all new Mexican women workers.

The problem with this kind of work is that it is never secure. Fish work is seasonal, depending on the weather, and if the fishermen can work or not. It depends on many things. But there was a time when we did not have fish to *filetear* and we got paid
by the hour. We could just pack fish or re-pack shrimp. But later they took the shrimp someplace else. So, they also took those few working hours away from us. They argued that fileteras should only work in the filetera line. And people working by the hour, just do that, work by the hour. Well, we got very upset, because that was not fair to us. There was not enough work to work by the contract. Whereas before, we could at least make some money working by the hour. By combining these two jobs, we could work two or three days a week. Working only as fileteras, we could be without work for a week when there was no fish. We could get unemployment when there was not enough work because it was always open to us. At least that helped us, but it was not the same.

In addition to the lack of work, they decided to open a night shift: so things got worse. That is why we started organizing. We wanted to secure our regular working hours because we had seniority rights.

Q: How many fileteras had seniority besides you Celia?

A: Let me see. Approximately twenty.

Q: Do you think that the company wanted to fire all of you?

A: I think that the thing they cared about the most was to supply the demand for fish at any cost. The fileteras with seniority were not their concern. They just did not want people working more hours. I do not know why. The fact is the fileteras from the night shift were receiving the same wages as we were, and that was not fair.

Q: In addition to wanting your hours back, what else did you want from the company?

A: We had no benefits whatsoever. There were no benefits for anyone. Well, there was a rumor about the supervisors receiving health benefits. We knew about it because there was a man from El Salvador --another Salvadorean, and he also told us about it. In terms of treatment, it was bad. The other foreman, Joe Dave, was a terrible man. He used to insult people very badly. One time he
yelled very bad things at a Black woman, and she in turn slapped his face. Even though I was not fluent in English, I could understand when people used bad words. He was terrible to Mexicans all he did was scream at people instead of talking. The supervisor I am currently working for has a bad temper. His name is Tony de Lima. But he has restrained himself because I warned him, I said: "Listen, I have high blood pressure. And, if you scream at me, I can get very sick for three or more days, and I will not come back to work." That was the condition I gave him when I went back to work. I also think that he learned not to mistreat me from the time we organized the union.

Q: The picture did not look good: you had no benefits and no work. How and when did you decide to organize yourselves?

A: When we, the fileteras started organizing ourselves, the majority did not want to be part of it. Because they had their working hours secured. They questioned our motives for organizing a union, since we made more money than anyone else. They wondered if we were going to be fired. So we answered back to them: "We do not care if we are fired. So what?" After a while, everybody saw that it was good for us and started signing the union cards.

Q: Tell me how you became aware of the possibility of organizing a union?

A: My sister Angelica told me: "Look, go and talk to this man." So, I went and talked to Newman [Strawbridge] and Alicia [Sanchez], I do not remember the month, but I remember that there were many of us women. All fileteras went to see him at his house on Sonoma Ave.

Q: How was your first meeting with them?

A: Newman told us that he was willing to help us to organize ourselves, and, in fact, he helped us. Later on, Alicia came to help him. He said that "we should receive health insurance, and that he was going to defend us." Well, yes, he was the one who was helping us. However, he was not that helpful because later on, we
started having several problems at work. You know? We had less work because the *patrones* were taking the fish somewhere else. I mean that they [owners] wanted to tire us, so that we quit work or the union. Later on, to make things worse, they closed the company because the owner died. It is then that everything was gone. Everything died. Well, I should say that the company informed us about its plans a week in advance. They told us that they “were going to close because the owner had died and they “did not want to keep the company open anymore.” They also had several problems with the city and the fire department among other places.

Q  Lets go back to the beginning of the organizing efforts.

A: Alicia and Newman told us that we needed to convince everybody to sign some kind of petition. So we passed the petition around to see who wanted to sign.

Q  But, tell me more in detail how you did it because you could not do it openly.

A: Yes, we passed the petition to whoever wanted to sign. That is how we did it, openly. Before we arrived to work, and during our breaks, we passed quietly the petition around.

Q  Were you afraid to be caught and be fired like the previous people who wanted to organize you?

A: No, I was not afraid. Other people were afraid, but even so, they passed the petition around. We called people and told them: “I am going to wait for you in such and such place for you to sign the petition.” And, yes, they signed it. Many people did not want to sign. But later on, when they saw it was for real, everybody signed it. The majority of men did not want to sign the petition. Only a few signed, but the others did not want to --more or less half of them. However, when the election for collective bargaining came, we won the election by a big margin. The nice thing is that the company could not do anything to cheat us with the number of votes.
Q: The *patrones* and supervisors never questioned what kind of list you were passing around?

A: They never questioned me, and I was one who carried a petition around with me.

Q: After you had collected enough signatures, what did you do, Celia?

A: We took them back to Newman. He said that since we had the petitions all signed, we were ready. He started setting weekly meetings to talk with him. Our first large meeting was very large; I think there were approximately thirty to thirty-five people. After that meeting we had different numbers of people. Sometimes we had more people, sometimes we had less. I remember that there was a meeting, a large one, but I do not remember when it happened.

Q: Do you remember why and when you had a large rally outside the plant? [April 5, 1988]

A: Les and Tony were the ones who were in charge of the plant. So, we wanted to talk to them. Well, we just got in a large meeting before that one. And, Alicia and Newman said that everybody had to be there at a certain hour --outside the plant to be ready to go inside the plant. At the beginning of the rally, they [the guards] did not want to let us in. Because of that event, they fenced the place. Many people attended that rally --friends, relatives, and community members.

Q: Did Alicia and Newman represent you?

A: Yes they did. But they were not able to talk to Les [company manager]. He said that he "did not have the time and did not want to talk" to them. Alicia insisted and requested a good time to come back to talk to him. By the second time, we entered the plant as a group, Alicia was able to talk to him. We used those meetings to inform him that we were organizing a union. The first time we entered as a group they did not recognize us. They even slammed the
door in Alicia’s face, but the second time, they dialogued. They accepted the fact that we were starting a campaign for an election for collective bargaining.

Q. Can you discuss what activities the workers organized during the campaign for the union election?

A. Fish was scarce for some days, I think they did it just to scare us. Later on, when they saw that we were serious about the union, they had no choice but to give us work. On one occasion, Les called me into his office and asked me: “You are one of the organizers?” And I said “yes!” “And, it is all your fault because you wanted to punish us by taking work away from us. I clearly told you not to make a night shift because there was not enough work for everybody. But you did not pay any attention to me”. He told me to: “quiet down everything” and he was going to give us our hours back. I said “No, we are not going to stop. This is what you are saying now. If we stopped, you will fire us immediately.” So I said “No!” “Because this situation has happened many times, and you had never done anything.” Buggatto [company owner] never got involved directly because he was always in San Francisco. The ones who were in charge of the company were Les Mundsen and Bob.

In reality, work became very scarce during the month we had the campaign for the union’s election. Several people were laid-off. [twenty fileteras, and fifty packers. In total, the company laid-off over sixty-five workers]. We had to raise money because some people were hurting badly economically. They did not even have money to pay their rent. We collected money among ourselves, and we went to different churches and organizations to request donations. We also had daily picket lines to let people know about what the company was doing.

At the beginning of the campaign, somebody proposed to us to go on strike, and some people became very excited. But I said no! They have so many companies that it will be easy for them to take the fish away. I had the morning schedule at the picket line. We started around nine or ten in the morning. However, do not believe that we had tons of support from everyone. Sometimes we had very hot days, and we had to stay outside in the scorching sun. And not everybody wanted to go. There was Julieta, Carmela, Myself,
Susana, Francisca, and Chava who came to support us whenever he
could. Carmelo, Pablo, and Gerardo also came. And many others.
But not everybody.

Q What else did the *patron* do to convince you to change your
mind?

A He did not do anything. He did not offer money to us, or
threaten us. The company, I guess, had enough sending the fish
someplace else. Once he [Toni de Lima] called me into his office
and offered me a supervisor's job. After twenty years of working
in production! He said to me: “Leave all the union organizing aside
and I will promote you to supervisor. You had been working for us
for so many years, and we had always treated you just fine.” I said
“No! “Those are all lies, you have never treated me very well. What
you are telling me are all lies. Because you said previously that
you were going to give us a raise” --because he always lied to us--
“and you never said when.” *Fileteras* got raises only every two or
three years, and we received it only because we pushed for it, not
because it came from the good of their hearts. So, at the end of our
conversation, I told him “do not lie any more to me because I know
you very well; you are not going to give us anything.” What was
even more upsetting was that he laughed at everything: everything
was funny to him.

Q Did you tell the union members about your conversation with
Mr. Toni de Lima?

A Yes, I told them everything, and everybody said not to take
the job, that everything was a lie. Everything that Newman had
told us about the company was true. Newman had said that the
company was going to try in different ways to make us change our
mind.

Q Did Newman and Alicia explain to you the problems you might
face when you organize a union?

A Yes! They explained everything to us; they warned us about
the difficulties we were going to face. They clearly said that it
was going to be hard because the company was going to take work
away from us.” They are going to treat you bad, and they will want to ‘buy’ some of you, and fire some of you. And they are going to make you many promises of good changes. “However, NS said, “the company will only promise you everything, all the company wants is for you to stop the union organizing.” But let me tell you this, the previous supervisor did not promise anything, he only fired people who wanted to organize. At least this supervisor, Tony de Lima, promised things.

In the past we might have been scared; but at that time, we were not scared. We were many, and we were organized.

Q: How did you prepare for the union elections -- for the voting time?

A: Well the same, Newman told us how the voting process was going to be -- none of us had been involved in anything like that before. He taught us how to vote and everything. He prepared us well.

Q: What happened the morning when you voted?

A: It was around 1:00 p.m. -- I think, one of the supervisors had a camera, and AS and NS told her no to use it. They asked the supervisor to put it away. We entered in line to vote, in silence. There were many people wanting to vote.

Q: Did you vote for the union?

A: Yes!

Q: Were you afraid of people changing their minds and not voting for the union?

A: Yes! I was afraid, as I told you, some workers did not go in and vote, because they were afraid of the repercussions if the union won. But we were going to win anyway. Many did not vote. [from over 200 workers, 157 voted. 137 voted in favor of the union, and 20 against].
Q: What did you do when you learned about the election results?

A: We were told that, if we wanted to know the election results, we had to wait until the end of the process. Many people waited. And, when we were told about the results, we were all very happy, and had a big celebration.

Q: What did the supervisors do?

A: They were all very quiet and said nothing, but you could see their angry faces.

Q: What steps did the company take after the election?

A: The company hired the best anti-union law firm from San Francisco to challenge the election. The company complained about the conduct of the election. They said that there was nobody who spoke Portuguese fluently, and the Portuguese speaking workers did not have representation. However, Portuguese people held supervisor or management jobs, and they could not vote. I was accused of forcing people to vote in favor of the union. They argued that I forced them when people signed the petition form. The company also accused us of fundraising money to give it to people, so that they would vote for us.

When I went to testify, I was very nervous, well not that much. I had never been in something like that, so I was afraid and kept wondering what the lawyers were going to ask me. Well, yes, they asked questions, but that was not so bad. I calmed myself down.

Q: Do you think that some workers did not participate in the campaign for the union election, and subsequently did not vote, because they were afraid of the patron calling the migra [immigration] on them?

A: I think undocumented people were a small percentage among the workers, like ten percent. Well, I am not sure because I really never talked to new people; I hardly knew them. I think the
majority of people who did not have “papers” were scared because they feared losing their jobs and having a difficult time finding another job.

Q  What happened after you testified? What tactics did you use during the time the election case was in court?

A:  It took over a year for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to decide about the union. We continued working, less work of course; the company continued taking fish someplace else. The workers morale was low. Some were very disillusioned. They said that “we worked so hard and we did not accomplish anything.”

Q  Were some upset with you—the fileteras—because you started all the organizing?

A:  Some people said things indirectly to us. They used to say to me: “See what we got for been involved in these things?” And I would answer: “Well, it is just like this in all unions, mostly when you start a new one. It is very understanding that when you want to win something, you have to suffer for it.” Some people got desperate because of the lack of work. I did not get frustrated; I understood the problems of organizing a union. One time, I got very upset because one of the Portuguese supervisors told me: “See what you won with your union? All you have achieved is losing work.” I said: “That is okay, I am not so interested in working. What I am interested in is to stopping the bad treatment towards Mexicans, and for you to stop doing things to people that you are not supposed to do. We finally grew tired of your bad treatment.” You know? This was a company that treated you with yelling all the time. If you did not protect yourself, all the supervisors felt free to mistreat you.

Q  Do you remember the affiliation with another union in 1989?

A:  Alicia and Newman came to tell us that other unions were asking us to consider affiliation. A priest came to hold the vote. As told us that it was going to be better for us to affiliate with the other union: Service Employees International Union (SEIU); so, we voted in favor of affiliation.
Q: What happened on July 21, 1989 when the union was recognized. Who presented the first contract?

Q: I also understand that you paid for your protective gear?

A: Yes, we had to buy some things: They charged us for boots, the stone to sharpen knives, the *chaira*, --the only thing they gave us were the knives. There was a period of time that we received the aprons free. Later on, they also charged us for that.
Celia Mendoza. Worked at Point Saint George Fisheries (PSGF).  
Second interview. March 16, 1996.

Q  Celia, before we continue talking about your first contract and the affiliation to Service Employees International Union (SEIU), I need to confirm with you a few things. A worker told me that often times you had to filet fish that was already spoiled, even with worms. What can you say about it?

A: Oh yes, that is very true. Well, sometimes the fish came --well, I do not know, maybe they [the bosses] left it without refrigeration many days --and when they put the fish on the filleting belt, it was already smelling and with worms. We had to filet it just like that.

Q  What did you do with the worms?

A: They [the bosses] spread tons of lime on the fish with worms, because you know that worms are killed with lime. And they washed the area very well. Only when the inspectors came without giving any prior notice, they were in a big hurry, cleaning and washing everything very well.

Q  How often did you work with spoiled fish?

A: Not that often, only when the fish came from Oregon, or Crescent City, or some other places, so that the fish traveled many days. It happened only a few times.

Q  But sometimes fish already smelled bad?

A: Yes, and for the bad smell and to prevent the fish from continuing spoiling, they used baking soda. First they washed the fish very well with baking soda, then we had to filet just like that. It was not always nice and fresh because fresh fish does not smell.

Q  How about the safety and sanitary conditions in the working areas?
A: Well, it was always clean; they were always cleaning. They cleaned the working areas, bathrooms, and offices. Once a month or every two months, they sprayed the place with some kind of gas. Workers were not supposed to be there when they sprayed the place.

Q One more thing, was the night shift opened before or after you started organizing the union?

A: Before we organized ourselves. That was the reason for our organizing! Because we did not have that much work after they opened the night shift. They were taking hours away from us. At that time, I had been working for seventeen or eighteen years, and the new fileteras were making the same amount of money as I was. To me, that was not okay.

Q Well, let's return to where we stopped in our last interview. In terms of the contract, do you remember what the contract entitled you to?

A: Oh no, I do not remember anything. I remember we started receiving health insurance, but we had to pay for part of it. We did not get a full coverage.

Q I understand that there was some kind of irony. It was the fileteras who started the organizing, and the fileteras could not receive health insurance coverage, because you did not work more than thirty hours a week.

A: Oh yes, the person who worked full time, received full health insurance coverage. The people who did not work full time had to pay part of their health insurance. Fileteras were the only people who did not work full time.

Q What action did the union take when you were not receiving health insurance?

A: Nothing, I hardly remember, but nothing.
Q: What else did the union do for you after it was recognized by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)?

A: I do not remember. The company was closed in September of 1993. After we affiliated to Service Employees International Union (SEIU), --well, I had been working for (PSGF) --I wanted to talk to the union representative, I do not remember his name right now. The man from San Francisco because, after affiliation, our representation was moved to San Francisco. So, I called him to find out what I could do to protect myself when the company closed down. I had been working for many years, and I did not receive any compensation from them. However, I was never able to see him. Believe me, I tried many times to seek representation, but I was left alone.

Q: What happened to Alicia Sanchez?

A: I do not remember when Alicia left the union. She did not have a meeting with us, nor explain to us the reasons for her leaving Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU). We only knew about it when we called her to find out about what kind of rights we had with PSGF closing. She told us that she was going to be working in Oakland, and that we had been transferred to the Local Janitors in San Francisco. Alicia told us that she was not going to be our union representative because she was transferred to another local. Our representation was moved to San Francisco because SEIU felt that we were going to be better represented by a local that had Latinos in their local. Alicia was unable to help us any more.

Q: What do you think forced the company owners to close it down?

A: What the foremen told was that the real patron had died, and his nephew who became in charge of his business did not want anything to do with this company. That was the reason. However, they had had problems with the city because people in the surrounding areas complained about the smell and other problems
related to the food process. But we had those complaints for the longest time. Now in terms of the buildings? When the safety department checked the buildings, the inspectors told the owners that they had to close those buildings because they were very unsafe, and the buildings were falling down. The new owner did not want to deal with the company, so he closed it down.

I was unable to find another job, and I was left without retirement and a job. A month later one of the foremen called me to ask me to work for them in a new company they had opened in Bodega Bay. So I agreed and it is where I am now working. We are six fileteras and four packers.

Q: Celia, to finish our interview, what kind of experience did you have with the union organizing?

A: I learned several things. One of them, well, for me? I had lots of fun, because I was so used to being in my house. My husband never let me go anywhere. So for me, it was a good excuse to go places. So, for me, it was fun! The other experience was that in reality, they helped us a little, but, in other ways, no. Well, they tried, not so well, but they tried. They tried for the patrones to give us health insurance. On the other hand, we got better treatment at work, because they treated us very badly before. After we started the union, they stopped misstreating us. That was one of the good things in which I saw good changes in favor of the workers. The other thing is that I blamed the union for the company closing down. I thought it was because of that. Who knows?

Q: How about personal growth because of your experiences in the union?

A: Yes, I think it helped me.

Q: Would you participate in another union organizing again?

A: I think that if I was invited to form a union at the place I am currently working, I would say no. I would not do it. Because it requires much work and struggle to organize a union. And, right
now, I could not do it. Maybe if I was younger, I would do it. But, right now? No. However, I would suggest to younger people to struggle for a union. In reality people learn to protect themselves against bad companies.

Q  Celia, what kind of influence do you think your union organizing had in the Latino Community in Sonoma County?

A: I think that some people did not agree. But the majority saw the union organizing as something very good. I think that the marches against proposition 187 were a reflection of our previous organizing because Latinos in this county had the experience of our union, our marches, rallies, etc. I also think that it was a positive experience to people, to give them the encouragement to protect themselves, to fight for their rights.

Q  Anything else you want to add?

A: No, thank you.
Union organizers,
Sonoma County Industrial Union

Neil Herring, Union lawyer
Sonoma County Industrial Union

Q: How did you get involved with SCIU?

A: I am not sure when the union started but I was in Japan from January 1987 to April 1988, and when I came home, I learned that some people were organizing Latino workers. I think, I first heard about Point Saint George Fisheries (PSGF), but I am not sure, anyway they were building a Latino union primarily for Latino workers. And I was anxious to get back into some social struggle so I [met] with Alicia Sanchez and Newman Strawbridge at the union hall. We sort of interviewed each other, and I offered to do whatever legal work they may need.

Q: Did you attend any meetings?

A: Sure, over the years. I did not attended regularly, but I went to several meetings with the workers.

Q: Since you offered your legal services, what was your primary role with them? Were you their lawyer?

A: I would say so.

Q: How did you start working with the union as a lawyer? What were your first tasks?

A: Well, I think this was well before the Calliope Designs strike began. So I think it was mostly in connection with the organizing with PSGF and, lets see. Yes, the PSGF was in June 1988--June 17, 1988.

Q: The election was June 17, 1988. The company filed several objections? What type of objections did they file? Please discuss the full process of how you prepared the workers for the hearing, and if you can remember workers' names.

A: Okay, the election took place on June 17, 1988, and out of a 178 eligible voters the union got 137, 20 votes against and there
were something like 19 challenged ballots. So on June 24, 1988, the company filed no less than 60 objections. Lots of them were overlapping or redundant. But the objections were aimed partly at the union or alleged misconduct during the campaign but very largely at the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) for not conducting the election itself properly.

**Q** Who was the Law firm representing the company?

**A:** The biggest employers-representing law firm in the west, maybe in the country now. We used to call them Hitler, Mussolini, and Fascist, because, at least at that time although they pretend to act more lightly today, they were pretty rabid union busters.

**Q** To your knowledge PSGF knew how to bust unions, since they hired this law firm. Was the law firm working with the company before the election for union representation?

**A:** I do not recall whether this law firm had an active role during the campaign. The company lost the campaign decisively, so I rather doubt they had good management consultants during the election campaign because they lost by a tremendous margin. Not that it might [have] made any difference [if] they had good counsel because the conditions were so bad that the workers probably would have voted for the union anyway. But they might have done more intimidating things during the campaign. I do not know, so this is purely a hunch. I think that they lost the election -- the company, and then they shopped around for somebody to get them out of trouble later on because now they were going to have to bargain with this union unless they set the election aside. So they hired Littler, Mendelson, Fastiff, and Tichy. And when these objections--generally unions lose some of the elections before the NLRB now--it is usually [a] union objecting to repressive conduct by the employer. In this case, the union won by a big margin. It was the company objecting out of desperation trying to get the election overturned.

**Q** Why is it happening now, the opposite way, that the unions are objecting to the election results?
A: Well because since the Reagan years, since 1980, through the 1980's and now, Republicans were appointed to the NLRB and to the general council of the board. And so they basically had [guttered] what were already feeble protections for workers and unions as far as winning elections and being protected against anti-union discrimination. So during the Reagan years they completely spoiled the liberal democratic case law that had built up for 30 years, and that is one of the reasons I quit practicing labor law. Because I could see what was happening, I quit in 1980. I could see that it was going to be impossible to help workers very much as the law shifted to the right. But anyway, I got back.

Q. By the time the company objected to the election for representation, were you responsible for all of the union legal business?

A: I do not know. Maybe that was the first big impetus to my getting active because they had no resources. Newman was a member, I think actually. Is Alicia a lawyer too? [Yes, but at that time she was working for California Human Development Corporation (CHDC)] But she had worked with either the United Farm Workers Association (UFWA) or the Agriculture Labor Relations Board (ALRB). [She had worked with the farm workers, but as a legal advice. But I do not think she was practicing law during those times]. No, okay, anyway, Newman was an Alabama lawyer but was not a California lawyer. Well [I was the only lawyer].

Right, and it was very fortuitous for both of us because I was really looking for a movement to help, to work with, and they were looking for a lawyer. It was great.

Q. Can you describe the objections, not one by one, but by their main theme? Can you also describe how did you prepare the workers for the hearing? To my understanding, they were all Spanish-speaking people who probably had no experience or understanding of the Labor Law System in the United States. Where were hearings conducted? And were workers allowed to be present?
A: Ordinarily when the Labor Board has a hearing on objections, or on [an] unfair labor practice charge, they do it in a federal building, in a hearing room which is like a court room. But Sonoma Avenue does not have any hearing room. Or, at that time it was a very small one I think. So the government ended up paying for space at the Flamingo Hotel. That is what they do: They go to a hotel and rent a conference room, and the government pays the bill for the hearing space, if they cannot do it in a government building. Well, the result is that these workers were involved in a hearing that was nowhere near the plant, and it was in a upper-middle-class hotel, and of course it was carried on mostly in English except when we had interpreters. And the company insisted on excluding the witnesses, which means, until you testify, you can not be in the hearing room.

Q Can they do that? Do they have that power?

A: Yes, this is not unusual, but it is a psychological, as well as a delegation tactic. It keeps the workers from first hand observation of the hearing process. So that makes it even more important to have some way of keeping the workers in touch with what is going on.

Q Were you having meetings with the workers, to inform them about the hearing while the hearing was happening?

A: I think, I do not remember what the schedule was, but there were meetings at the union hall at least once a week, maybe two or three times. And during the time the case was going on, I would try really hard to go to those meetings and explain directly what was happening at the hearing, and what they could expect to happen from then on.

Q How were the workers feeling at that time? How did they respond to the company's objections? Did you plan any activities to keep their morale up?

A: I think they were very upset and puzzled about a legal system that would say you win an election by that huge a majority, [and] you cannot start negotiating for contract, or let say, the company
does not have to start negotiating. And though we had to explain that this could take months before the Labor Board could tell the company: You have to negotiate now. We are going to certify the union as the bargaining representative. You got to negotiate with them, and actually I am sure I told the workers that even after the objections were resolved, if the company wanted to delay it, they could have delayed bargaining with the union as long as two years.

Q  What was their response after you informed them of that? Was their morale down?

A: No, I would not say so. That is the down side. The up side is that, they could if they were willing to engage in economic action, if they were willing to strike or hurt the company with their economic power, they could force the company to give them what they wanted a lot faster.

Q  Did they use the economic action? Were they able to use it?

A: They never [went on strike], but they certainly had demonstrations and marches and perhaps there was low-level job action on the shop floor. Workers can always express how unhappy they are by slowing down, [or] like breaking things, [or] whatever.

Q  But is it not true that during the election campaign the employer started sending fish to other places so that the workers could not work full time during the time you waited for the election?

A: Yes, I have a file about lay offs, apparently in March of 1988. It was before I even hooked up with the union. In March the union filed an unfair labor practice charge saying that they were threatening the employees with plant closure and diversion of work because of their organizing activities. So that was one charge, with the NLRB in San Francisco. I see that in August the regional office of the Board issued a complaint, an unfair labor practice complaint about that--for threatening employees with the decrease of work because of union activities and telling the employees that they may close the Santa Rosa plant because of the union activities. So that was a threat for the election. The hearing
was scheduled for October 18, 1988 on that charge, and then eventually it must [have] gotten settled. I have a file about that. And then, it seems to me that, after the union won the election, there were lay-offs. And, we suspected that the reason work was slow was because they were farming out some of their processing to other plants on the coast.

Q  How many plants did the company have?

A: I think [there] was one near Eureka, and one in Oakland. I see that that charge was settled on the basis of the company posting a notice in January 1989 saying that they would not try to interfere with the workers' rights to organize by threatening to decrease the work or close the plant.

Q  Was that helpful for the workers to keep their morale up?

A: By January 9, 1989, [it] seems to me that the workers already started bargaining. No it is not true. I can see that we were still delegating the company's objections to the election on March of 1989. So probably, we did not get [yet] certified, I do not know when we got certified. It is not in my file. Probably not until late spring of 1989, a year after the election.

Q  Lets go back to the hearing. How did you prepare the workers for the hearing?

A: I would always meet with the workers either at the union hall or at homes and, because my Spanish is not terribly strong, I would often have an interpreter, somebody to help me which was very, very important, so first of all there were certain workers identified as the source of some objections. I could see that our witnesses Salvador Bejar, Celia Mendoza, Pablo Mendoza, Rosa Soto, were supposed to have made threats against certain pro-company employees and, although those witnesses could not be in the hearing room until they had testified, I could certainly meet with them before they were to testify. And, I did. We met with them, and we went over their testimony. I would tell them what the company witnesses were saying, and I would basically keep them posted on what to expect. So, first of all, they would have
met with me, they knew me as the union lawyer. They would have met with me in their language at least a few times. They would come to the hearing, those who were going to testify, and they could watch what was going on. When they were at the hearing waiting to testify, I [would] always go out for lunch with them, so to decrease the sense of isolation. And that is how we would try to break down the fear.

Q Did you find workers afraid to testify because they may have been undocumented?

A: They were nervous, but they were not intimidated. First of all, nobody was going to ask anything about their papers. I would assure the workers that no one could even be allowed to ask that question and that there will be no migra (immigration) present. So that would not have been an issue. In fact, it would have been a labor law unfair labor practice, for the company to call the migra on our people who were obviously active in the union.

Q How many workers went to testify at the hearing?

A: Well, for the company, probably, you know, four or five workers and two or three bosses. And for us, I would say six to ten workers actually testified. I think Newman or Alicia testified about the nature of SCIU as the union.

Q Did you choose workers to testify?

A: The company has the burden of proof in their objections, so they had to go first. So while they were putting on their witnesses to support their objections, we would listen, take notes of who they were accusing of what. We would cross examine their witnesses and weakened their stories as much as we could. And then we would know who we had to call when our turn came to rebutt the company's case.

Q After the NLRB representative ruled in your favor, did the company sit down and bargain with you?
A: First the Hearing Officer ruled in our favor, rejected all the objections. Then the company went to appeal to the Labor Board in Washington, and eventually the board upheld the hearing officer's decision and certified the union. But that took, like I said, that took about a year.

Q: In the meantime you were having complaints from the workers about unfair labor practices?

A: Well, in the mean time, the union could not get the company to bargain about a contract, but the union did, take out the workers grievances informally. The company would not admit it was recognizing the union, but there were lots of contacts, and things happened you know. Some of our people were disciplined and we would complain to the company as a union, or we would file unfair labor-practice charges. Or, we would fight their unemployment cases. I mean, there were a lot of attempts to intimidate the people that the company saw as organizers.

Q: As I recall you were fighting for economic improvements?

A: The company could not be forced to recognize the union as a bargaining agent. The workers wanted to improve the conditions. They wanted higher wages; they wanted insurance, that kind of thing. But until the company was forced to recognize the union and sign a contract they could not get those things.

Q: What were you doing in the meantime while you were certified? What actions were you taking?

A: We had this other law suit for the safety equipment, forcing the company to provide gloves and boots--gloves, boots and aprons. In other words, the company would required the workers to wear that stuff, but would make them pay for it. And I think also, there was a question about knifes that the workers had to use. Maybe they had to use their own knifes. So we sued the company in the Superior Court for all the workers, and we ended up settling with the company basically with them giving us what we had sued for --that they would pay for all these protective things. And I think it was a morale [builder] because, you know the workers saw it
was possible to take the company on. Again, the problem is, the more success you have in the legal arena, the less people rely on their own power.

Q: Exactly, but at the same time you were having rallies outside the plant, you were trying to have economic impact on the company by talking to restaurants about your boycott towards PSGF, and you encouraged them not to buy the company's products. What else were you doing?

A: You can boycott: it is not illegal. You could ask restaurants not to deal with PSGF, and not to buy their products.

Q: Were you successful?

A: You know, I had forgotten about that. We did try to track down who their customers were and I think that we wrote to them: maybe we even contacted them. I think that I developed a data base, a mailing list of who those companies were, and the contact people. Maybe we organized some telephone calling to call them up...

Q: Going back to the union certification. Do you remember when you were certified?

A: Yes. It was June 15, 1989.

Q: What happened after the union was certified?

A: Well, the company could have delayed longer negotiating with the union, if they wanted to. But they did start negotiations looking towards a collective bargaining agreement, and actually that did not take more than a few months to reach a collective bargaining agreement.

Q: Who was part of the bargaining committee?

A: I was not involved in the PSGF negotiations at all, and I think that by that time the union either had just affiliated or was just about to affiliate with Service Employees International Union.
(SEIU) and, of course, there would be a workers' negotiating committee and either Newman or Alicia, and I think maybe somebody from local 707.

Q Who wrote the contract proposal for the union?

A: I had written clauses for the Calliope Designs contract and probably some of those clauses were proposed by the union to PSGF. But I do not think I had put together a whole contract proposal. Actually, I think the company; PSGF came out with a package proposal first. See one of the things that was a weakness in SCIU leadership was not taking organized coherent steps in collective bargaining. In other words, not putting out a coherent union package proposal. I think the good part was that they had meetings with the workers as any democratic union should, to developed a sense of the things that were most important to the workers, to get in the contract. But then, putting them into a coherent contract proposal, I think they got very late with Calliope Designs and maybe not at all with PSGF. My impression is, at the PSGF...What the union did was kind of react to the package put on the table by the employer. I am not sure. Do you know if the union got affiliated by the time they got a contract with PSGF?

Q No, according to Alicia, affiliation did not happened until two years after they started organizing. Going back to the contract. What do you think made the leadership of SCIU weak in terms of knowing how to do the collective bargaining? Did they have any people with collective bargaining experience helping them?

A: I do not think that either Newman or Alicia had ever represented a union in collective bargaining. Paul Kaplan may had been active, but I do not think that he had ever been on a negotiating committee at his union.

Q According to Paul Kaplan, he also saw a weakness in the leadership when they were negotiating with Calliope Designs, but he said that he did not have the union collective bargaining experience that he has now.
A: You know, I had represented unions that bargained for contracts for twenty five years. But I was not closely connected to the negotiation process, so I had a second hand understanding of negotiating.

Q Did you have any other union members, or other community members who have had experience in collective bargaining assisting you? Were Alicia and Newman prepared by someone? Alvaro Delgado wrote this article in October 14, 1988 describing what the company was offering. What kind of proposal did your union present to the employer? Did you have one?

A: No, that newspaper article was written when the workers went back to work, after the strike, so it was when the bargaining was over. The workers voted to go back in without a contract.

Q Because they did not get a closed shop?

A: No, that is mistaken in Alicia's terms. A closed shop is illegal in America. A closed shop is a shop were you must be a member of the union to get the job. That is illegal in America. What the union asked for, was a union shop.

Q Maybe I misunderstood Alicia.

A: Where you must, if you worked there under the collective bargaining agreement, join the union within thirty days. Or if you do not join, you must pay dues to the union without joining. So the union wanted a union shop, and the company refused a union shop and the usual accompaniment to that are dues check-up. If you have a union shop, then you can say: "The company will deduct the dues every month automatically from the pay check and then the union does not have to go around and collect individually from every worker." And Calliope Designs resisted a union shop and dues check-up.

Q Why?

A: That kind of guarantees a permanent support for the union.
Q: The workers really wanted to have the union shop. They did not get it, and they decided to go back to work without a contract?

A: Well, the other thing the company was adamant about was wages. The piece rate scale that the company offered were pathetic and were not significant. Now, there was a stratum of workers in Calliope Designs that were doing very well, you know, they were making...I do not know, very well in terms of that industry. $10.00 or $12.00 an hour at piece rate. But the majority of them were not, and at the bargaining table the company will always point to the workers who were making good wages and say: "Hey what is the problem with these rates?" "No problem."

Q The company was focusing only on the few who earned a higher wage?

A: Most workers there were paid by the piece rate. But the company would focused on the workers who were high earners under the piece-rate system.

Q Lets go back a little. Were you present at the meeting, or meetings, when the workers decided to go on strike because they were getting nowhere with the employer? My question is; How did they reach the decision to go on strike? Were they aware of the benefits and/or consequences of a strike? Because in Mexico -- when workers go on strike, the "scabs" have a very difficult time going into the company to work. The strike cannot be broken and the company practically shuts-down. Since these workers were mostly from Mexico, were they well informed about what could happen if they did not win the strike, what could have happened if the strike lasted a long time. As I understand, the union was very new and did not have a fund.

A: The short answer is "Yes." I was aware of that cultural difference since I have represented Mexicano workers for a long time, and I know people believed the same system applies here. So I think they knew that they could be permanently replaced. That is a phrase of the United States law. But, I think that they also had a lot of confidence in their solidarity, and they were very optimistic. They believed that the strike would not be long. They had not an
inflated idea, but a strong idea of their indispensability to Calliope Designs. And, this is always a dangerous misconception.

Q Because they were thinking that they were going to be on strike for one or two weeks?

A: Well, that is what people usually think, that they will put a lot pressure on the employer at a moment when the employer needs production, and the employer will have to capitulate.

Q Do you remember when they went on strike?

A: Sure, it had to be around July 1988. Let's see. If you count backwards thirteen weeks from October 15. Around the middle of July.

Q If this was a Christmas ornament company, and they went on strike in July, were they not a little early to put pressure on the employer?

A: Well, do not forget that the company sold wholesale. The company probably had to ship by September. So I think that the workers--Our analysis was that the longer the strike went on, the more the pressure would be on the company, you know. If they did not settle in August, they will be looking for more production in September. So we would be more and more successful in hurting them, and we did try to keep track of how much stuff was being shipped from Calliope Designs. We tried to watch that carefully, to have a sense of our effectiveness in stopping production. But, I think that our projections were optimistic.

Q How so?

A: I think that they managed to get out more production using supervisors and bosses and less skilled workers, and they managed to get out more production than we hoped.

Q Did they hired other people to work?

A: Oh sure. Yes, they hired scabs.
Q: What was the workers' morale like when they saw that two weeks went by and the employer did not negotiate?

A: I think that they were very strong at the beginning, and I do not think that they were demoralized. Maybe never. I mean, I remember being worried about watching them go back to work. And worrying that they be demoralized and that may be the end of the union because I had been through this situation with even tougher strikes. And I have watched people go back to work with scabs, you know, seen them take their jobs and that kind of stuff. And, it is very demoralizing. But I think the Calliope Designs workers felt; "Hey, we taught them a lesson we showed them we cannot be broken and we are going back with our dignity. And, if something happens in the shop we do not like now, we [teach] them a [lesson].

Q: Were the scabs fired right after the strike was over?

A: Pretty quickly. They were not skilled workers.

Q: What was interesting is that they hired other minorities to work, right?

A: Well, they had some South-East Asians. Well, that is the problem. Today people are so hungry for jobs. As long as you can replace strikers, it is very hard to win any strike.

Q: Do you remember --I was talking to Alicia, and she told me that the company hired some security guards to help the company keep the strikers and their supporters off their premises. And also, at some point there was an incident. The company accused one of the active members of hitting one of the guards with her picket sign. Were you in charge of helping her?

A: O, Paulina Martinez, yes. Sure, well, it was simply a company tactic. You cannot fire strikers. You can fire a striker who engages in strike misconduct, that means violence, or intimidation, or interfering with the scabs going to work that kind of thing. But, you can fire the strikers [for these things]. If you do not fire them, they have the right to go back to work when the strike is over. So this was a pretty difficult case in a way. The company got a report
from a guard that Paulina had struke the guard or tried to strike the guard, and at most, it was a very glancing blow if anything. But they insisted upon that and fired her. Now that could have been to the advantage of the workers in a very important way.

Q: How?

A: This is complicated. There are two kinds of strikes in the U.S. law. One is what is called the unfair labor practice strike. So an unfair labor practice strike is one that is caused or aggravated by the company committing an unfair labor practice, which is defined in NLRB Act. And the usual unfair labor practice committed during the strike would be not bargaining in good faith, or firing strikers unlawfully. So, if the union has been able to say...and I think we actually did this, we did tried to convert the strike into an unfair labor practice strike after Paulina was fired. Why? Because the key difference is that if you have an unfair labor practice strike, you cannot be permanently replaced. When you say: "I am ready to go back to work," you must be given your job back. If you are a non-unfair labor practice striker, which the law calls an economic strike, then you can be permanently replaced. So if the company claims it has replaced you with a scab, if you are on an economic strike and you say: "Okay, the strike is over, I am reporting for work." They can say: You do not have a job any more. So the stupid thing from the company's point of view about firing Paulina on this flimsy pretext, was giving the union an opportunity to convert the strike--I think it happened around August. First of all, it angered the workers. So it increased their solidarity. And from the legal point of view, it gave us the chance to convert the strike by changing the language of the picket line into an unfair labor practice strike.

Q: Because you had gone on strike under the economic strike?

A: So that by protesting Paulina's discharge, we turned it into an unfair labor practice strike. So that made it doubtful, at least whether the company could permanently replace any of the Calliope Designs strikers. Well, that is a big threat that they no longer could have over the workers heads. So we tried to explain that--I mean, of course they were angry about Paulina, but first of all, we
said: "We can challenge this and we might win," and secondly, we said: "This might help the strike."

Q They were angry because Paulina was a minority woman, and her husband and children were at home?

A: Her husband was disabled, her husband had had a bad back injury. And Paulina was the sole source of support during the strike and for about four or five months after.

Q Was she taken to jail?

A: I was not there when it happened, but now that you mention it...The judge was somebody I had known for many years because of my practice, and he was known as a no nonsense judge. And he wrote an excellent decision stating all the facts very precisely.

Q Was the judge's decision before or after the strike was over?

A: I am sure the strike was over. Labor Board precedings take a long time. I am sure the hearing did not even take place until after the strike was over.

Q When all the workers went back to work in October, was Paulina with them?

A: No, they would not take her back.

Q When you won the case, was the employer forced to pay her back salaries and take her back to work?

A: That is right. That was won for the union.

Q What happened after they went back to work? Did they have any more negotiations? How were the workers treated?

A: I do not have first-hand information. I think their morale was pretty high. I think they felt proud that they had survived for three months without wages, and involved the community in their support. So, they were not intimidated. They did not go back with
their head down. Then they had developed good leadership, there was Sara, Adolfina. Good strong people, and they functioned effectively as Stewards. So when anything happened, they would stop work, go with the employee into the office of the boss and confront the boss. And usually not just one, but two or three.
Q. You were talking about how strong the Calliope Design workers were when they went back to work after the strike, even though they did not have a contract?

A: Yes.

Q. You mentioned that Fina Hernandez had some problems at work. Can you describe what happened to her?

A: You know, I do not have a clear memory of this but, there was--here is the way I remember. Some issue of those in the shop. Fina actually suspected that they were trying to intimidate her into quitting, like a boss would drop a box that just missed her, stuff like that. I remember, and she went in to complain about the way she was been treated, and other workers went in too. Maybe Mario; there were two or three at least, who confronted the bosses about the way these supervisors was acting. And something or other. Fina got so upset that she had some kind of--she either fainted or...she got ill physically and she actually had to leave work. And she was off work for a while when she came back. And I think that she and one or two other workers were disciplined for the way they had confronted the boss over Fina's treatment. There was an unfair labor practice charge, and they got like, I do not know, a three day disciplinary suspension or something like that, maybe a ten day suspension. And I filed a new unfair labor practice charge. And, I do know what the up-shot was. By the time that case went to the hearing, I was not representing the union any more. The union did get the hearing without a lawyer and...

Q. Who represented the workers then?

A: Well, you have to understand. The Labor Board has both its own prosecutors and its own judges. So when the Labor Board decides to issue a complaint, a Labor Board attorney acts as the prosecutor. So it is all they had, they had a Labor Board prosecutor. I did get the Board to issue the complaint at the meeting, but somehow I was not involved in the hearing, so it must have taken place after I got butted. And, they lost that case. They lost that
case. The company lawyer persuaded the judge either that the workers had been insubordinate or somehow that the company had the right to discipline them, which was not important practically. I mean, they only lost a few days wages. but it was a bad blow to morale.

Q The workers called you at home to inform you about the suit results?

A: That was way down the road. They went back to work in October. I think that incident did not take place until the Spring, I think in March. And then the hearing would not have been until September. You know, it takes a long time. We are talking about September, 1990. I was long gone. Now, I did have continuing contact with Paulina and Fina.

Q Because you were able to win Paulina's case?

A: The fact is that I won every case I did for the union.

Q Did Fina ever have a case with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)?

A: Only about, I think that they did not actually try to fire her, they gave some bull-shit about taking her back, saying that her doctor had not released her because after her illness...she had some kind of minor heart attack or strock. And her doctor released her and they would not take her back. And we put pressure on the company to take her back because her doctor--she could not, and they did, they did. They could not get away with firing her. But she did, I think leave voluntarily after a certain point. I am sorry I do not see them. Let me say one more thing about Calliope Designs, which was that, they did have some degree of victory. When there is an impasse in collective bargaining, which was the situation when the strike ended, the company can implement its last offer. So they did go back in with somewhat better terms than they went out [with]. So from their point of view, they were really clear in their minds that this was not a defeat. This was a victory, which is pretty amazing. These were amazing compañeros. (comrades)
Q: You had worked with Latino workers; you had represented them in different labor cases, so this was not your first time. How did you view the strengths, weaknesses, etc., of these workers?

A: It is hard to generalize, but I think that they were a remarkable group of people. They were very brave. Some of the workers, not so much at Calliope Designs but at PSGF, were undocumented, so they were brave. They were taking tremendous risks. I thought that they had great solidarity and self confidence. You know, in ten days of hearings of the PSGF objections, they were never intimidated. They were not intimidated by being cross-examined by the company lawyer or by being in front of the judge, nor by saying something the boss said was a lie. They were just not afraid to stand up for the truth. And they were also very surprising, because I have worked with workers my whole career, but they were very sophisticated.

Q: How so?

A: When you talked about tactics or strategies, whether it was legal tactics, whether it was about tactics in the struggle. They grasped what they were being told. They took in that information, and they would do what they had to do with it. And really, it is very hard for, like you were saying; "for Mexicano workers to come to grips with how lop-sided U.S. labor laws are. And they did not like what I had to tell them about that, you know. It was all a one-sided proposition, stacked in favor of the bosses. But they came to grips with it. You know, they figured out what they needed to do within the context of the imbalance of power. So to me, really it was a privilege to be in that struggle.

Q: We hear everywhere about Mexican women being docile and quiet. And that they do not have the strength nor the knowledge to struggle to better themselves. We know that women comprised the majority of the workers in both places, Calliope Designs and PSGF. How did you see them in the struggle? Were they quiet? Did they give the power to men? Or did they take the power from the beginning and organize themselves?
A: At meetings I did not observe any unusual deference of the women towards the men. I definitely observed sexual structure. The women were the ones who took care of the children, always. And very few of the men dealt with the babies, and children in the room. But apart from that, I think that the women were not afraid to be in leadership roles. While they were not disrespectful to the men, I saw lots of times when a man would put down a woman's ideas in a meeting. And the woman would not stand for it. She would talk back and say--you know; "You cannot talk disrespectfully to me. This is what I think, and still I think I am right." Basically, she would be saying; "I am not scared by you." So I do not believe any of that stuff about Mexicana women being subservient. I think that at home...I think that my own observation was that they separated these domains. That at home they are willing to be more traditional and responsible to the children's well-being and their care, more than the men. Not the demand of the men that they do the shit work, the so called shit work. But out in the work force, I did not see that.

Q You saw them as equals?

A: Yes, I would say so. I think that they were what you were suggesting. They were more than equals, they were in leadership roles, and I think the men accepted that. I also did not see...I saw hardly any disrespect of the man for the women in leadership.....Well, that is the bitter irony of the struggle, really, that all that potential dissipated because there was tremendous potential leadership and empowerment in those workers....Look, Latino workers are the invisible industrial base. So what was so exciting about this was that this was a spontaneous movement of Mexicano, largely Mexicano workers, who could have built a democratic independent union, and could have...I mean, my dream was that they could have led the way towards unionizing a lot more of Sonoma County. And the people as individuals were certainly capable of that. They were really bright; they had lots of energy. Look at all the hours, and time and effort they put into building this union.

Q What do you think stopped them from building a strong democratic and independent union?
A: I think that the problem was the kind of leadership exerted by Newman Strawbridge and Alicia Sanchez. I think that they tended to operate on charisma and on impulse, instead of always looking at tactics and strategies. Because it is a class world, there is no mistake about it. In the world you have to look at tactics and strategies all the time. They would often operate on intuition and on impulse. So that was their own style. But a more profound problem was that they never really cultivated and developed leadership from the workers themselves. I never saw any of the workers take on Alicia and Newman--challenge them.

Q: But how would the workers challenge Alicia and Newman if they were supposed to be the ones with the knowledge?

A: Exactly, exactly. That is just the problem. That if a different culture or a different democratic culture had been cultivated, and if gradually Alicia and Newman had self-consciously moved to the background as the indigenous leadership came forward they would have been in a different situation. That is what you really have to do. I mean, let's face it. If you are an alien intellectual, I do not care what color, I do not care whether you are Sanchez or Strawbridge, you basically come to this situation as the top-down intellectual. You are not living the workers' life really, you know. But if you spark it, you get it started and then have the good sense and the smarts to withdraw as the workers are empowered. Then you really have a base of people whose capacity for struggle is unlimited. It does not depend on whether Newman and Alicia have a break-out, whether Newman kicks out the lawyer or the translator. You know, it does not depend on all those individual decisions because the workers are really in command. And that does not mean that they cannot give good advice about things they do not know a lot about. Sure they can. But I think that was the basic flow of this organizing effort that the charisma and the leadership was never transferred to all the natural talent from below.

Q: You were also mentioning earlier that the workers were not put in a leadership role to negotiate with the employers. Do you think that it could have been a way where the leadership could have
been turned over to them? If the workers could have been prepared about tactics and strategies and knowing how to read a contract proposal, etc. do you think that could have helped the workers?

A: Yes, workers on the negotiating committee at Calliope Designs were ready to participate directly. They were a little intimidated by, you know, being comfortable in English. So the conversation always had to be translated, and parts of the conversation unlike court, did not get translated.

Q Why?

A: Well, because it went so fast. You know, the bosses would make a long speech in English and Alicia would summarized it...or someone would summarized it, or I would in two or three sentences for the workers. Well, that is very alienating when you do not really know what the other side is saying, so that was one problem. Another problem was that there was not a planning preparatory meeting with the negotiating committee--ever. When we got together, and we would say here is what the union wants to accomplish at this meeting, the bargaining meeting. Here is what the company is probably going to say: Here is what we should counter. There never were those preparatory meetings...

Q How did you prepare for your meetings then?

A: We just showed-up. We would be lucky if the union side would have actually reviewed what the company had presented, not always. Never mind if the union side [would have] prepared a coherent response to what the company had presented.

Q Who was in charge of preparing the union responses?

A: It would be Newman and Alicia, and I would be in the side lines pointing out: "This is a problem, what the company is asking for--you Know--This is something in our proposal we probably won't get, but we can cut loss...

Q At that point, did you have access to a computer? This may sound stupid but, if the union had an office, a computer and other
office materials. Could not your negotiating committee have met and worked on your proposals, and responses, make copies for people and brain-storm about your tactics and strategies?

A: Well, all my work was done on a computer, yes. And I think other people helping the union were also using computers.

Q Who was in charge of putting the packages together?

A: I have to say that Newman and Alicia could not care less about papers, proposals, files. You know, the nitty-gritty of preparation. They just did not do that shit.

Q Did they have anybody doing it for them?

A: Not that I know of, I only know the part I did. I do not know what anybody else did. I did not know what Kim or Rick [community volunteers] or other people did or Paul [President of Service Employees International Union (SEIU)]. I never saw any paper being generated by anybody but me. Except for the leaflets, the leaflets, yes.

Q As I understand, they ([Newman and Alicia] were never worried about papers or files. I also understand that people offered assistance to set-up a file system? My understanding is that they never said no, but they never set time aside to have people help them.

A: See, that would have required delegating some power. I think wherever there was an issue of people taking a little delegated power, Newman and Alicia always opted against that. They did not want anybody organizing the office files. They did not want somebody--whatever--writing leaflets. Did anybody write leaflets except them? [No that I know]. I would have involved workers in writing a leaflet. In fact, some of those workers could easily have learned the word processing skills to do something like that. [Maybe leading a meeting?] Yeah, leading the meetings, very important, nobody but Alicia and Newman ever chaired the meeting. That is a key place where workers [could have] see the two intellectuals withdraw, and they step forward and run the meeting.
Who ever decided what the agenda for the meeting was? There was never a sense of agenda in those meetings. Nobody who came to those meetings would know: "This is probably what we are going to discuss, this is the order of... No, it was all like whatever Alicia thought of next to talk about. And that is what I mean about all depending on charisma. You cannot build an organization based on two individuals. You cannot.

Q: Let's put this analysis on the side for a while. By the time the collective bargaining came to PSGF, Were you already gone? Or were you still working?

A: No, I was there just to the point before they signed a contract with PSGF. So I do not recall when that happened, but I was there.

Q: Who prepared the workers' proposal at PSGF? Because PSGF and Calliope Desings were unique to the extent that both workers worked at piece rate.

A: It became clear when the Board certified the union, that the company was going to accept that result, and that they were really willing to negotiate an agreement. And I think that the company took much more than an initiative, they put out a proposal... I think the union never put out a proposal of its own to PSGF management, but rather, just reacted to the company's proposal.

Q: Why? You said previously that the way you won the elections was clear, that most of the workers wanted a union. The company was fighting you in the legal way for more than a year. Why, you actually had that time to prepare yourselves. You did not prepare a proposal in the event of being certified by the NLRB?

A: It could have happened during that year, of waiting for certification. It also could have happened in the month or two right after certification. It could it have [been] a series of meetings with the--I mean, that would have been a point of high momentum--he workers had this legal victory. The company was
saying; "We won't stall anymore; we will bargain. That would have been a great time to hold meetings and develop a contract package from the workers' side. I do not think that happened.

Q In your own view, why do you think you, the union, did not write the contract you wanted to have?

A: I tell you, I do not think that Alicia and Newman were interested in the bureaucratic aspect of organization building.

Q But writing a contract is not bureaucratic. Writing a contract is securing the workers rights, no?

A: Yes, the first contract is the most important.

Q Yes, and despite all the actions the employer had taken against the workers, you were still strong. Workers continued participation in the union activities. Writing a contract collectively would have been a strong push to their morale, don't you think?

A: I could be wrong about this, but I do not recall ever seeing a union package proposal to PSGF. I do not have a file on it. But I just do not remember seeing something the union put together based on the workers' desires. Here is an interesting note: "May, 1991, and it must be from PSGF from the timing. A note of mine saying; "Alicia tells me that the company had rejected the union's proposal, they were going back into negotiations, June 18 and 19 and she wanted a particular clause drafted by me to take back to the bargaining table in June of 1991.

Q You were still working with the union until 1991?

A: Oh, sure, I must have been.

Q When did you leave the union?

A: It must have been within three or four months of this. Because the contract did not take long to settle. At PSGF the
negotiations maybe took two months, the company wanted an agreement. I think the workers were mostly interested in pay and vacations, those were the big issues.

Q: Do you recall some workers who were active in the union and they were laid-off?

A: I remember they fired Carmelo because he operated a forklift in a kind of reckless way. Was not that his case. Oh, he got pissed-off, and he did some kind of macho acting out in the yard, like racing the forklift around at thirty or forty miles an hour. And they said: "That is not safe; you are fired." I think that was an unemployment appeal that Michelle handled. [Michelle was the new union lawyer].

Q: One more question: Why did you leave the union? Did you leave before or after affiliation to the SEIU or after?

A: Just after the affiliation vote. I basically left because I got in an [argument] with Newman, and I did not think it was possible to continue with the union while Newman was so antagonistic to me. And Alicia would not--You know, Alicia would basically silently siding with Newman. I had been critical of some of their work: Not maintaining paper work, not paying attention to things I pointed out in the affiliation election process, so that the ballot that got drafted was not...running the risk that the employer could refuse to recognize the union. I think they never took advantage of that; the union was lucky. Anyway, I left certainly not from my own desire. I would have stayed and struggled as long as possible. But I left because I got into a personal, near physical altercation with Newman. And just because of the style of leadership, it was impossible. Not withstanding my close ties with several of the leading workers, it was impossible for me to keep on being part of the organization, if I had a beef with Newman.

Q: After you left the union, did you keep in contact with the workers?
A: Only some, only some. Workers will call me if they have individual legal problems. There were a few cases going on, like Paulina's and Fina's cases. Actually, I would have been okay with continuing to do legal work for the union. The only thing I said to Alicia and Newman was; "If affiliation goes through, and if SCIU becomes part of SEIU, and if SEIU Local is going to have legal help and pay some union lawyer, then I want to be paid. I am not going to work for free if SEIU lawyers are getting paid. I even offered to accept some ridiculous low amount of money for the legal work."
Alicia Sanchez, union organizer, Sonoma County Industrial Union

Q How did you come in contact with Calliope Design workers, and how was Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU) organized?

A: I think what happened, I am not very good with dates, [is that] before we even started SCIU, a group of us came together, and we thought that one of the ways in Sonoma County we could probably get...

Q Who was “a group of us?”

It was a group of people who came together [to organize workers]. In a sense, we really did not have a name [for our group]. It was called the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC), and Newman [Srawbridge] was one of the [people] who knew [how to organize workers, because] he had been a Labor Commissioner. [Newman] knew the labor laws and the wage and hour regulations [set by the Labor Commission]. He came to all of us and [asked us to organize workers into a union]. [We were] a group from the community; I guess you could call us progressive [people] in Sonoma County. We thought that we should form a union. Workers’ rights [were being] violated at their workplace, [and] they [sought assistance from the] Labor Commission, in a sense, for a short term remedy [to their working problems]. [Actually,] not a remedy at all because during this time we had the Republicans [in power], and they were in control of the Labor Commission. As a group, we decided [that we] should help workers in the long term, and that [meant to us], to form a union. A [union] predominantly [composed by] Latino workers. Because, in Sonoma County, this particular group of workers were the ones that were the most neglected. They were the ones that other unions felt were unorganizable. And the reason was because those unions did not have a Spanish-speaking agent that would be able to communicate with those workers.

Q What were other reasons? Lets say, if they were to have had Spanish-speaking union organizers, would they have been inclined to organize Latino workers?
A: No, [not] at that time. I think you are right, unions, even in 1995, I will say that unions are barely starting to realize that they have to organize new workers. But in 1988, I do not think [that organizing Latinos] was on the agenda of any of the unions. They were still trying to maintain their membership. [They were] not inclined to go out and organize new shops. Maybe once you interview Newman, he will tell you that he himself went to other unions and tried to solicit [their] involvement in organizing latino workers, being that they [Latinos] were the majority, [of] the composition of the workers in Sonoma County.

Q: What were the unions' responses when Newman approached them?

A: I think that they were not interested at that time. They were not organizing, and they did not have the resources, one of them being the fact that they did not have Spanish-speaking organizers.

Newman came to [our] group and said: 'Look I think that we [need] to find out what the [working] conditions are for workers and, [based on that, we need to see if] there is a need for a [Latino] union in Sonoma County. We need to develop a flyer that [investigates] wage and hour violations.' Newman developed a flyer. If [the person] answered 'yes' to any of the questions, the person may have some money coming to him or her. The flyer asked about violations [in relation to] wages and hours, non-paid overtime work, [and coffee] breaks. Those kinds of questions.

Q: So, it was a questionnaire?

A: Yes.

Q: Who was in your group? were any Latino workers members of your group?

A: There were two Latinas. Everybody else [in our group] was white, [and] educated. They were workers in a sense, but workers in professions, not [manufacturing] jobs. This was a group of people who felt it was very important to try to remedy some of the injustices that were happening against Latinos at their working places.
This was a group of wonderful people, very hard-working people. When we decided to do this, Newman said that people could call with questions. We answered some of the workers' questions in relation to working violations. Newman taught us some of the labor laws, so when we returned the workers' calls we knew how to answer their questions. When workers made the first contact calling us, they had to leave a message; we had an answering machine.

Q: Who wrote this questionnaire?

A: At first all of us brainstormed together. Newman was predominately doing it, writing it. It was Newman who got the leaflet out, and rented a place so that he could receive mail and have a telephone number and an answering machine.

We got telephone calls from people, and we called them back, and answered their questions. But the final question we would ask...

Q: Who was paying for your expenses?

A: At that time Newman. And the reason was because he was trying to create a job for himself, since he was, like I said, a labor-law investigator. In this way, he was developing a job for himself. Newman felt, it was important for him to be the one to cover all the expenses. At the same time, we were developing a political agenda. This particular group of volunteers, was trying to find out how we could help Latino workers in Sonoma County. And we thought that forming a union was the way to do it. We saw the need to form our own union. But before we said we want a union, we had to find out what the working violations workers were experiencing in their workplace were. Who was this group of people? In which factories were these workers experiencing working violations? In what industries did they work? It was not true that only Latino workers were experiencing working violations. We felt we could answer all these questions by first distributing a flyer to workers and having them call, or write to us. This work took several months. And, as I mentioned previously, we would try to answer correctly as many questions the person had, in relation to the particular working
violations the person encountered [at the work site]. [However, before] we completed the [conversation] with that worker, we would ask the person [if] there were other workers at [his or her] work site that were as angry and pissed-off as he or she was [We asked the worker if] if he or she thought of forming a union. Or joining a union. [We usually asked that question to people] after we had answered all their questions. It was [quite] interesting [to hear the] anti-union sentiment people [expressed in our conversations]. They would respond immediately, ‘I do not like unions!’ [Many of us in the Center] had previous experience organizing workers, [thus we were aware of a general adversion to unions]. I think this adversion was because people were not well informed about unions, [and they did not know about union history]. We did not [become] defensive or upset. On the contrary, we asked them in a [friendly manner] if they had any [awareness] of what kind of services and protection from employers unions [provided] for workers.

Q: Why were these Latinos so anti-union?

A: It was not so much Latinos; the people who [expressed] anti-union [sentiments] were predominantly white.

Q: Then your questionnaire was being distributed to everybody, not only Latino workers?

A: [The questionnaire] was in both languages [English and Spanish]. The calls we [received] came [from] both groups--native [English] speakers and Spanish speakers.

Q: But the anti-union sentiment was coming mostly from white people?

A: [Yes], predominantly whites, they had an anti-union [sentiment]. [However], as we started talking to them, we found out that [often] people did not know about unions. It was lack of information or a misconception they had [about unions]. But we took time talking to them, and after [our conversation] many [people] had a better [understanding] about unions.
Q: When you were talking to people on the phone, at the end of your conversation did you ask them confidential information, such as their name, place of work, etc.?

A: The questionnaire included a place for [the worker's] return address, a telephone number, and his or her name. [Therefore], the worker, [if he wished to call], could just call [our telephone number] and leave his or her telephone number and name. We distributed the questionnaire in areas we thought working class people [lived or worked]. [For example, we distributed the questionnaire at] the unemployment office, K Mart, different grocery stores, and social services buildings. [When] we [gave out] the questionnaire we told workers, [that their answers to the questionnaire] were confidential. We [also] explained the confidentiality issue [at the beginning of our] telephone [conversations]. We also told people that we understood [their position], and that we were not going to say anything that would [compromise] them because we did not want them to risk [their employment]. So people felt very confident to let us know their working site. It was interesting; they trusted us.

We [Newman and I] were surprised at the number of telephone calls [we received]. That is how the Calliope Designs workers contacted us--from what I remember. They found out about us from the questionnaire. I am not sure just exactly [how they contacted us]. I think they just called [our telephone number], and we talked to them. Newman probably talked to them [before I did], [because] one of them spoke a little bit more English.

Q: Calliope Designs employed mostly Latino workers, and most of them did not speak English?

A: Yes, there were twenty-one Latino workers [employed] at Calliope Designs. The first [step they took] was to call us. [Then they talked to Newman and said: 'we have so many [working] violations; so we would like to talk to you about [them]. If you can help us, we would like to set up a meeting [with you].' They did not want to [discuss] the working violations through the telephone. I think they [were more interested in] having a meeting.

Newman and I met with them at an attorney's [office]; she is a friend of ours--Colleen O'Neal. [At O'Neal's office] we talked to
all of them. [Well], almost all of them came --twenty workers; the other one was on maternity leave. So I think she did not come to the meeting.

Out of the twenty people, or twenty-one, there were five couples, husband and wife who showed up. We met with them. I went there to translate, even though Newman knew a little bit of Spanish, to make sure. And it was interesting because they didn't know until our fifth meeting that we were actually husband and wife.

They told us all the violations that were going on [in their workplace]. Their [health] insurance was bad, they talked about wages --not getting the wages [they felt they deserved] [Workers were] being asked to do detailed [ornaments]. Workers at Calliope Designs made Christmas ornaments from a dough [paste], and the [ornaments] were very detailed. The required a lot of work and time [to make]. These [people] worked piece rate. Often, they were not being paid [according] to the detailed work. [Several] of them had been working for Calliope Designs for many years. Some of those workers started [working] when the company [owners] were working out of their own kitchen. They [workers] had been with this company for a while now, I would say [at least] ten years.

Q: What were the workers expectations from this meeting? Were they expecting immediate results?

A: Exactly. Let me go back now that I have remembered. Now I remember! The workers had gotten really upset, they were so fed-up with the employer that they walked out. Before we had the meeting. They walked out! And they went to California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) to talk to Christina Briano. Christina told them go back to work, and she contacted Newman. They were real lucky to be accepted back [to work].

Q: When did they walked out from their jobs? On Martin Luther King Day --1988?

A: Oh, that is right! That is right! Yes because in fact at one point we were considering naming the union, --the workers thought about naming it MLK's union. Instead of SCIU because it was on his aniversary that they walked out [their jobs].
Q: What was so significant about Martin Luther King Day that the workers choose that day to walk out?

A: It was a mere coincidence that they walked out on that day. Later on, I think when we met with them, we talked to them about the significance of that day. They were aware of Martin Luther King, but it was not like they chose that day [because of Martin Luther King]. They just happened to choose that day because it was on a Monday. They were just sick, they were sick of all the work they had to do. I think they probably were pissed-off not to even have that day [as a paid-holiday]. They just completely walked out, and they were sent back by Christina.

On that [Monday], in the evening, they called Newman. and we met a few days later, like two days later. And that is when we talked to them. What you said earlier is true. They expected us to provide legal advice, [to explain] their rights. And that is what we [did, we] talked about [their choices]. We said: 'If you want a short term remedy, this is what we can do: 'You can file at the labor commission [your complaints] and you can get a [short] remedy. Maybe you can get an attorney, but you do not have a recourse in law.' Or we said: 'you can think of a long term remedy], and it is going to be a hard struggle, and that means forming a union. You can think long term, and that means forming a union.' It was interesting because they were [asking]; 'what do we have to do to form a union?' We proposed to them; 'you can even think of going to the labor commission and talk to somebody there. The fact you are not even being paid over time, or breaks, or whatever. Because you have to work piece rate so fast. There is some remedy there.' Or we said: 'you can think long term and fight to remedy this situation by forming a union.' And on of them said, 'what do we have to do to form a union'?

Q: Had any of them been involved in any union organizing? Did they have prior experiences, or was this the first time they had heard of union organizing?

A: We talked about what a union meant: All of them coming together, [and] being able to decide that they were going to change their lives by coming together. What was interesting, [was that] one of the women asked: 'I do not even know if she will remember
this, but Angelica is the one that asked the question: ‘What do we need to do? What does it take for us to form a Union?’ And Newman said: ‘All you have to do is make a motion.’ That is when I turned around and, translating, I said to the woman: ‘Lo que tienes que hacer es una mocion para decir que quieren una union.’ What I meant is you have to make a motion to form the Union. --We were all in a circle. She sat there for a few minutes without saying anything. I kept thinking ‘Why in the world is she taking so long just to say I move to form a union?’ What she did is that she lifted her arm in a fist and said: ‘Me siguen --would you follow me?’ And what happened is that everybody started saying ‘yes, yes, yes, --si, si, si.’ Of course, I almost started crying. And I always look back, and I go: God! It was a beautiful day, because it was the first time I saw all Raza, Mexican united in strength. And what [happened] was, the woman, when I had translated: ‘you have to make the motion,’ she felt she had to make a movement, a sort of physical movement. So that was when she raised her fist, thinking that was what I meant for her to say: ‘I move to do this or that.’ So that day, I remember all those workers yelling ‘si, si, si.’ And what she said was: Do you follow me? do you follow me in forming the union?’ I think for all of them this was the first time they have been involved in a union. Or even know about a union. I remember when we later on talked about wearing a button or whatever, none of them knew what a union button was. They kept thinking it was a regular button, so they did not understand why we wanted them to wear a boton --you know.

For me it was a incredible moment in my life because I had been working before with the United Farm Workers, and I knew what it was like for Mexican workers to be so oppress. With the United Farm workers, I did was indirectly organizing [workers]. I was doing legal work for the united Farm Workers.

Q Were you a lawyer already?

A: No, at that time I had just come out of law school, but when you practice with the NLRB you need to be licenced.

Q But you had experience working with Latino workers, regardless they worked in the agricultural or manufacturing industry.
A: What happened with me; what drew me to work with the United Farm Workers, [was] because I saw from my own --my parents were farm workers, and I saw what kind of conditions they had to work under. [What kind of conditions] Mexican workers have to work in the United States.

To me, that is why that particular moment [was special]. When this group of workers said: 'We are willing to come together and together we are going to change our lives. We are going to change our living conditions here. Together, not individually, or anything else, each of us thinking [it is] our own labor case with the labor commission, but [one] as a group.' To me that was such a historical moment, not only in my life, but in the history of Sonoma County. Because it was this particular twenty-one workers who decided that they were going to change their lives by doing something that is not common --working together as a group. In my personal life, I got to see workers like my parents, and I was probably around their same age, as they [the workers] were. In a sense people who have been suffering a lot, finally take a stand and say that they are going to change their lives, [that is historical]. But I also think it was historical for Sonoma County because we now had a group of workers, who on their own, decided that they were not just going to join a union, they were going to form their own union. They were the first latino workers in this particular kind of industry [who formed a union], because we still had the agricultural workers [who were not unionized yet by the Farmworkers Union]. In Sonoma County, these were the first Latino workers who stood up and said: 'we are going to form our union.'

Q: It was the first time, to your knowledge that Latino workers in the manufacturing industry were organizing a union in Sonoma County?

A: Exactly, and [they] were forming a union, which was unique, they were not just going to join a union, they formed their own union.

Q: Were they informed about the existence of other Unions?

A: I think we did talk about [it] during the whole discussion. We said, 'if you are interested, you could try to go and talk to other
unions and see if they are willing to organize [you].’ I think that Newman also mentioned that he had gone and talked to other unions. He had gone and talked to other unions, and right then, those unions were not interested in organizing latino workers because they did not have the resources -one of them being an organizer, meaning a Spanish speaking organizer.

After the [workers] said yes, we want to make our own union, we talked about what they needed to do to protect themselves. We were concern that things were moving sort of fast, because these workers were lucky that when they walked out their jobs, they were not fired. I think they were not fired because this is a skilled work.

Q: Why do you think they were not fired?

A: I think because all of them walked out. And this was a skilled work that took a lot of training for people to do it, and you have to not only learning how to do this Christmas ornament, but be fast enough to make it profitable for the business. These workers were already trained in this kind of job, and for all of them to walked out --the employer would have [had] to be really dumb to say: ‘you are all fired.’ He would have been without a labor force. This was a small employer; this was the only business he had. He had worked out of his home with his wife, and developed his business, and he did not have [the] experience [to deal with] a complete walk out of the workers.

We felt that we better do something to protect the workers, and the reason was because more than likely this employer was going to do, was what most employers do -they end up calling an attorney, saying, ‘Look I have this kind of situation.’ I have workers [who] walked out, or workers demanding certain things, what are my remedies?’ So we said to the workers: ‘What we need to do [is] for you [to] declare that you want to form a union, that you are organizing [a union]. The NLRB protects workers from getting fired, or from being intimitated, if they are interesting in organizing.

Q: To whom they were suppose to declare, the employer?

A: To the employer, you could just do it [in any way]. You could
do it by a petition, [or] by a delegation. What we decided to do [was that] we told all the workers, 'What you need to do is that the next day when you go to work is to wear buttons. We did not say [exactly] the next day, I think it was [within] the next two days or something, because we had yet to make the buttons. We said, 'All of you have to wear buttons,' and that is how I remember one of the workers saying: 'What do you mean we have to wear buttons?' They thought we meant a regular button --shirt button, [or] blouse button. To me, the reason that [question] stayed in my mind, is because eventually that particular worker --which was Sara Ochoa. Sara would eventually will learn so much about law, and boycotts and labor law --she became an active member. I always remember that first meeting and seen someone like her because she did not know what a button was, and later, [she] became one of the union leaders in our union. [She] became so knowledgeble and active.

Q: Was anything done in writing besides the buttons to protect the workers from the boss?

A: The law simply says: 'if an employer has knowledge that someone is organizing, and by [the worker] wearing a union button, all of [the workers] wearing union buttons. That itself is a sign of organization of unity of the union --that is why we made buttons.

Q: How did you make your buttons?

We made our first buttons on the following day --one of the workers had a son [that helped us]. We put [down] a glass and we cut out [a piece] of like cardboard. We used round big ones, a round piece of glass. And so, I wrote on a piece of paper --so the [worker's] son could print it. We put: 'We want the union/Queremos la Union '. I think we did it in both languages, [and then] we decided --I could not tell you if it was the next day, we said the night that we made the buttons, that we would meet [the next day]. Or it was two days later? They went to work at 7:30 a.m. We decided, [for] all of us to met the next day, at 7:00 in the morning. Outside the worksite. And we met at 7:00 a.m. Newman and I, and all the workers. One worker gave the buttons, to each one of them, and they all pinned them to their clothes.
Q: How were the workers doing, were they nervous, scared, etc.?

A: This was interesting, they were all very, very nervous, but they were very determined to do it, it was not like they were afraid or anything [like that]. They were just nervous because this was a new thing and they did not know what to expect.

Trutfully, Newman and I were terrified. We were like: ‘Oh my god, this is incredible! We do not know what is going to happen, we do not how the employer is going to react.’ We did talked to workers about that. We said: ‘The employer may go berserk [crazy], he may fire all of you. Even though you have remedies in court, if you get fire. More than likely, [if] he is a typical employer, he is going to call a lawyer right a way, the lawyer is going to say: ‘do not touch these workers any more because they are protected under the law right now since they want to organize.’ So we gave all these information to the workers. That morning, I remember it was kind of dark, [and] we all met outside [the factory].

Q: How did they respond when you warned them about the employer’s response in terms of firing them. Were the workers familiar with the United States laws and institutions?

A: No. I do not think so, but my experience has always been that workers just in general, regardless if they are White or Latino. Is that they have this incredible trust for the Unites states laws and in lawyers without realizing that the United States laws are not [interpreted to necessarily] protect workers: Their first instinct is to trust that the laws are going to protect [them], that the legal system is going to protect them, that these lawyers are going to be like god. Then later on they discover that is not true [all the time].

Q: That may be true for Anglo people, but speaking strictly of Mexicans that come from a very corrupt legal system. Do you think they trust the United States legal system?

A: My experience has been that Mexican workers, when they come to the United States, they believe that the law here is different, that is different from their country, that there is more just and that [law] is going to protect them. It really does come as a shock to them later on when they find out how limited the
protection actually is. We said to them: 'The law does protect you in one way. If you want the union, it will protect you.' I always tell workers you can still get fired, but at least the difference is that now you have a remedy, but before, you would not have a remedy. Now you can at least go and file charges saying that you were fired because of union activities and that protects you.

I remember that they were all very, very nervous. It was a little dark, they decided to walk in together. They usually came at different times. [But that day], they all decided to be there exactly at the same time, and they all gathered together. One of the women, then passed all the buttons to all of them, and then all of them pinned them to their clothing. We all held hands and I said a prayer. I said: 'I asked God to protect these workers that they have been so courageous and to continue having the courage they have portrayed.' We knew that we were doing the right thing. I do not remember exactly the prayer, but I just asked for protection of these workers throughout the day.

They all walked in and Newman and I stayed outside in the car waiting to see if any of them could come out. Newman and I took turns, he stayed there for a little while, and then I stayed out for a little while. Just throughout the whole day, to make sure [we were there] in case something came up. So the workers would feel safe. We told the workers that someone would stayed outside the whole day. At lunch time they came out and we met, we checked with them to see how they were doing, and they said 'they were fine that the employer was really shocked and asked them: 'Why they were wearing those buttons and everything else,' and they said, 'Because we want a union.'

Q: Do you know if the employer had any experience with union organizing?

A: No, I think what shocked him even more was -- this employer [was] what you call a small employer, a family oriented. He was so shocked that his workers would go against him. He was more than anything else hurt, hurt at the fact [that workers were organizing]. That made the struggle harder because he took it so personal, he did not take it like a businessman, he took it more personal. That
[attitude] makes the struggle harder when you are trying to deal with somebody that takes it personal. because they become really stubborn.

Q After that day, did you met again?

A: At first we were meeting everyday or every other day, then later on, we would meet weekly. Because from then on, we were developing what we wanted, what we want to do. We said that we wanted to file for an election.

Q What was your second legal step?

A: The next step was to go and file in San Francisco for an election. We had the workers sign cards, a petition that says we want the union because we had to show that the majority wanted it. The workers signed a petition, and everything was bilingual. At this time it was mostly Newman and I working with them. And then we met with the rest of the group from the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC). As we started moving on the struggle, as we started working out the details. We met with the other group and we said: 'Now we have a union, and these are some of the things that we have to start doing.'

Newman went to file the petition for an election to San Francisco at the NLRB office because I was working, and the workers all signed it. You have to show that the majority, well not the majority that certain percentage [of them] wanted [the union]. There were of course a few inside who said no, they did not want it [the union]. But ninety to ninety-five percent of the workers did.

So we filed the petition, and what we continued to meet during this whole time --before the NLRB gave an election date. We kept meeting with the workers and talking to them about the laws and what kind of campaign the employer was going to do to try to discourage them from voting for a union. We had to wait a month or so. I think in those days it was a little less time.

By know the LLEC had became SCIU. In a sense SCIU, one of the things I can say is that the philosophy was that one of the strategies that we had as a union was that we felt it was very important for the community to be involve. That it could not just be labeled by itself but one of the strategies was that we called
labor and community strategies, which means that you have to involve the community. We started to let the community in, to become aware. That there was a group of workers.

Q: During our last interview you said that your group decided to include community groups to support the union. You also started describing the necessary steps to file a petition for an election. Can you elaborate on that?

A: Usually when you file a petition for a union election[with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the NLRB notifies the employer. [At that point], the employer starts his [anti-union]campaign trying to discourage the workers from voting [in favor of ] the union. We [also decided to] have a campaign. [We] involved the community to come and support these workers. We [also] started to have [rally-type] lunches at Calliope Designs at noon when the workers came out [for lunch]. [We had them once a] week, sometimes we would [have] them on a Friday, every Friday, or sometimes every Tuesday.

As I remember, we started [having] a small group of people, --fifteen to twenty people came to have lunch [with the workers], and then [the number of community members supporting us] kept increasing [as weeks passed]. These lunches became really popular because people knew that they could come and there would be a pot-luck, or people [simply] brown bagged. We ended up having a lot of people coming. We ended up having a lot of people come. At one point we had a priest come and do a mass during lunch. So these lunches became real popular and they ended helping the moral of the workers too. One of the things that we would do after the lunch, and this usually were like half an hour lunches only. So we used to do lots of things within the half an hour. I would usually give them a little up-date, and we would do a pep talk to the workers and the community. Then at the end of the lunch we would all go in a circle hold our hands and have a moment of silence, not prayer because there were so many people from different beliefs, some with religious beliefs, and other with no religious beliefs.

Then we will have moment of silence and then we all would start clapping hands cheering, the workers would walk in. We would cheer them on, as they walked on, we clapped because they went in.

This helped the morale of the workers, I think the workers were sometimes a little embarrassed. But I think as a whole it helped them to keep their spirits up during that time.
Q: What other strategies did you use to help the workers win the election for collective bargaining? Did you contact the media? Did you visit workers at their homes?
A: We did [everything], we also visited other organizations. [However], during the organizing campaign we did not [rely as heavily] on organizations as much as much as we did [while] we were on strike. [Our main strategy was to] talk to the community members, [to inform them about the struggle].

I gave certain workers, who knew English, a list of telephone numbers and names of community people, and I gave them a [script]. In other words, I would [write] a little script [for them] telling them what to say: 'Hi I am Fina and I am a Calliope Designs worker. I am calling you to invite you to a lunch on Friday from 12 to 12:30pm. If you can, [please] bring your own lunch, but we [will also] have some [food to share]. [Please] come and support [our struggle]. They [would say] something like that. The workers would make [the telephone] calls to the community people.

Then two months after, we had the election. We won!—Two months after. The vote was:—I guess, twenty-one [workers voting] in favor of the union and two or three [against the union]. But twenty-one was the original group [who sought union representation], and they all voted solidly for the union.

The employer did not object to the election, [and] we were certified. Immediately after, we started the [contract negotiations] campaign.

We negotiated for [approximately two months], but then negotiations broke down. —At that time, we were [already] meeting [with the workers] at the labor center [on Corby Avenue]. During the time we were negotiating with Calliope Designs, the Point Saint George Fisheries (PSGF) workers [were simultaneously meeting with] us. [They] asked us to join the union, I will talk about that later. Let me just finish with Calliope Designs and [how we organized the contract negotiations, and subsequently the strike]. During that time, we had those two struggles happening simultaneously, [Calliope Designs, and PSGF].

The negotiations [with Calliope Designs] broke down, [and] the workers decided that they wanted to do something more dramatic [to have a fair contract]. One of the things that they wanted was to go out on strike. Newman and I kept saying "no, a strike is very hard". We were trying to discourage them. We felt that there were other ways [to
negotiate] a contract. Maybe [we could] just have informational picket lines, a boycott. We could find some other [avenues], instead of going out on strike.

But the workers insisted on going out on strike. [Let me explain that] our union was real democratic and the workers were the ones who ruled, and they were the ones that had the vote. [After several discussion], we had a secret ballot vote. Newman and I did not vote because we were the [union] organizers, only the workers [were allowed to vote], and they voted twenty-one [in favor of a strike] to zero [against]. [It was clear], they wanted to go out on strike.

Q: What were the employer's tactics to win the workers back?

A: This particular employer did most [of his anti-union tactics] before the election. After the election was won and the employer saw how strong the workers were --his particular employer did not pressure the employees as much as I have seen other [employers]. He did not try to change the [workers wishes to form a union]. Before the election the employer's campaign consisted in having a big lunch. [Well] one or two big lunches, like a party [for the workers]. [The employer] also sent a letter to [the workers] saying: 'We are shocked at these [events] happening because we [have] been like a family; we have been at your baptisms, parties, birthdays, etc. [The letter mentioned things] like that. [The letter also said that 'we are really shocked that you [the workers] did not let us know about these [problems], and that you were unhappy.' That was basically the employer's campaign, [two parties and a letter].

I think [what] helped these particular workers...[Despite the pressure they had after the strike], because there was a lot of pressure inside the [factory] after they went back from the strike. I think that when you interview those workers you will find out that there was lots of tension inside. [However, the tension at Calliope Designs] was not as severe as other places I have seen.

Q: Are workers more exploited when they work piece rate than when they work for a wage? Or because they are "more specialized " do they earn more money?

A: I do not know. Both in PSGF and Calliope Designs [there were] piece rate workers, but in PSGF [there were] also hourly wage workers. But I do not know if it is more specialized because look at PSGF. It is
true that a filet worker is more specialized and is paid piece rate. I guess in a sense you are right, you have to be more specialized in order to be paid piece rate.

Q: But you have to work faster because you earn your money by piece not by the hour?

A: Exactly, that is why the workers knew they were being exploited because there were some ornaments that took a lot of work. When they looked at how much they were getting paid for that piece, they found out they were working for less than minimum wage, or [for the] minimum wage. Even if they worked really, really fast, some of those [ornaments] took a lot of time [because] they were very, very detailed [pieces of] work. I guess in a sense if you work piece rate you are more specialized than if you for work for hourly [wage].

Q: Going back to the strike. Do you think they had a clear idea of what a strike was all about?

A: I do not think workers truly understand the implications of a strike. Nobody actually knows what a strike is like and whether you can sustain it. I mean, if you are a worker, if you never had gone out on strike, you have no idea what it entails, and these workers themselves did not know. Newman and I were really worried because we kept thinking that a strike creates disunity, divides [us], [and] makes us break-up as a union. We said to the workers: 'you have to [make] three commitments: you have to love each other, which the workers thought to be kind of funny'. We said a strike is very, very hard and you really have to consider caring for each other. You have to accept each other's differences because [of] what is going to happen. We told them that during the strike there will be some people who will be very active during this time, and they will be at the picket line all day long, everyday. Others will come only once in a while, and instead of you getting angry at that person who comes [to the picket line] only once in a while, you have to accept each other's differences. That means different people have different needs, different demands on their lives, and you have to accept it. And the third thing is that you have to finish the struggle. If you started [it], you have to finish it. You started saying that you wanted a
union, going on strike is part of that now, and you have to be willing to
finish it.' Later on, for PSGF we used the same things when they wanted
to join the union. But we added a fourth one. [We told the PSGF
workers]: 'You have to turn around and look at the person next to you and
say: I am willing to lose my job for you.'

The workers as I mentioned voted twenty-one to zero to go out on
strike. I think that we went out on strike on July 13 [July 16], for some
reason that date stays on my mind, then we were out on strike for 13
weeks. During these three months, I have to tell you, I was shocked, so
was Newman, at the unity, the solidarity, [and] the love that these
twenty-one workers had for each other. They fought together, they were
against the employer, [and] they [were] committed to the strike. We did
not have a single penny to sustain the strike. They went out with cans to
the taquerias, to little restaurants, and asked people for donations. They
[also] went to community groups and asked for donations. We got a lot
of support from other unions, and even from places like Catholic
Charities. [These groups] would bring us food donations, [I mean]
leftovers, or whatever, they would [just] bring it to us.

We had lots of people supporting us during these thirteen weeks.
We used to laugh a lot because during the strike all of us gained weight.
It was funny, we knew if you were skinny, you have not been on the
picket line because people would bring us donuts in the morning and
sometimes lunch to the picket line. It was a very hard struggle. We
thought that we were going to be on strike only a week or two, and we
were shocked to find out that we were [on strike] for thirteen weeks. The
reason it was so long [was] because there was a woman who mixed the
dough [for the ornaments]. Her name was Lupe [Farias]. If she had not
[worked], the employers would not have been able to hire others. During
the thirteen weeks the employer lost a lot of money. The ornaments that
scabs did for them were [of a] very poor quality. One thing I mentioned
earlier about this employer is that he took it very personal [in part]
because he had no knowledge of labor law, [and because] he took [the
union organizing] very personal. And that is why I think he was willing
to suffer through those thirteen weeks and lose lots of money.

I think that, in general, employers take it too personal prolonging
the struggle [because of their personal feelings]. They end up losing
more money than if they had just sit down and tried to [negotiate a
contract]. As I mentioned this critical person [Lupe Farias] was just very
anti-union. She was the [only] one who knew how to mix the dough, and so, then the employer ended up hiring other people [to work], and she trained them.

Q: Was the employer, during the strike, able to produce the very detailed, fancy ornaments? Or was he producing only simple ornaments?

A: I think they were doing very simple ornaments. They were real simple ornaments, and I do not think they completed their orders as they wanted. So, finally after thirteen weeks, we decided that we would go back. We were able to gain through negotiations some other things that we wanted. A lot of the workers wanted their paid vacation. [They wanted their wage] to be based on the piece rate [wage] instead of $5.00 per hour. They were able to get other economic gains, benefits, and in general what the workers found out was that they got mostly everything they wanted except for one critical thing, and that was union security. What is, union security's. The shop is a union shop, is a close shop, and everyone who works there has to become a union member. The employer rejected our proposal and said no, that he wanted it to be an open shop. That was the only thing that kept us from signing a contract. But the workers said: 'No, we are not going to sign a contract because we will cut our own throats by signing it without probation.' Instead, they decided to go back to work, End the strike, go back to work, but without a contract, because they had everything else [they wanted] except the union security. And their attitude was: 'we will just always pretend we are a union in there.' The twenty-one workers will continue to stand strong and be there.

Q: Why if they were union members did they not have a contract?

A: They did not want to sign a contract that would bind them because they knew that the Calliope Designs would end up.

Q: How were they going to be protected without a contract after they went back to work?

A: Because in a sense we were still negotiating, even though we just ended the strike, we continued to negotiate, it was still being a union. We had been certified as a union. We just did not have a contract. And
the employer cannot change the conditions he gave you already. He cannot go back on that. So the workers whenever they had disagreements [with the employer] they would just come together.

Q: Can we discuss the strike more in detail, the picket line, how the employer responded to the daily picket line?

A: He hired scabs. He hired a security guard to keep us from picketing in a certain area. Calliope Designs is really isolated from the main stream. So it was real hard for us --for the community --for people to see that we were on strike. I still viewed it as a success considering the community knew [about the strike] only through the media but never really saw us because we were like in a building that was inside a complex. We were doing so many activities that people were surprised that we [Newman and I] were so involved in the PSGF [struggle] and Calliope Designs' strike.

Q: By this time July - October, PSGF was already organizing their union. Were they also on strike?

A: No, they were just getting ready to organize. We were meeting with them. At that time some of them --I think they ended up also doing the organizing drive --they were doing that already at the same [time]. They were already collecting signatures for recognition. So at that time both of those [activities] were giving [the union] publicity. [Returning to Calliope Desgins], the community, riding by, and people driving, could not tell Calliope Designs was on strike. We continued the [weekly] lunches, [and] as I mentioned, the community [used to] come over [to] have a regular [weekly] lunch with us. We [also] ended up having people coming and participating in the picket line --[people] from different unions [also] came and helped us out. Because we were on the picket line from 5:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., or 6:00 p.m.--a twelve hour [day]. So we had people come and help us, [they] spent time with us in the picket line. We were also having meetings with the workers [to form committees], to decide what else we needed to do, what [places] we had to go to and tell people about our strike. During the strike we ended up having a worker getting fired from Calliope Designs, Paulina Martinez.
Q: How was she fired being on a strike?

A: The employer accused her of touching the security guard with her picket sign and he got her arrested. And [later during the day] we went and got her out [from the city jail]. The next day or so, the employer came [out to the picket line] and just told her, told her that she was fired. He can do that; he can fire her. He did fire her in fact, and threw her check at her, on one of the picket lines that we had. I mean, not a picket line. We [were having] a rally, a lunch rally. So he came out there and just kind of threw the check at her and said 'you are fired.' We won the case eventually. We filed a [complaint] with the NLRB saying that the firing had been due to union activity. And it was an unjust firing.

Q: Was Martinez a very active union member?

A: Yes, she was. We ended up winning her case and after the strike she was reinstated back to work. And she got [retroactive] pay for the time she was out. [In the meantime her case was settled]. [Wining her case] was a victory for us, for the union.

Q: How much time did she spend in jail?

A: Only a few hours. We bailed her out right away.

Q: When you were talking about your union not having the time to save money for the strike fund, and you had helped, were you able to sustain people's expenses? You mentioned that you had several couples working in the same place. Being on strike, two incomes were gone. How did workers manage to survive financially?

A: We did not have funds at all because of the fact that we did not collect dues during that time. I am sorry we did collect dues, I should say. It was $10.00, the workers voted that they should have [to pay] $10.00 per month [in dues], [and] they wanted to put it into a fund. [In terms of financial problems] workers borrowed money [during the time] we were out on strike. We did not have any money. The union did not have any money to make house payments for people or whatever. People
borrowed money from relatives or whatever. The only kind of donations we were able to get were food items [or], to buy food for them, or whatever. But when it came down to their household expenses, like rent, electricity, or whatever, many of them ended up having to borrow money for three months!

Q: Could you explain how some of the workers survived financially for three months, and none of them left the union?

A: That was a shocking thing, the unity. They ended up becoming closer to each other, helping each other out a lot. Single people would end up not taking as much food and making sure that couples took more. They divided everything equally and fairly. It was really wonderful to see the love that all of them ended up having for each other. The beautiful thing was that none of them ever backed-out of this whole thing. They really stuck with the third commitment we made, and that was that they finish the struggle. They waited until the last day. One of the things that I remember is that when we took the vote, one of the workers there --Javier [Arreguin]-- I remember, was very angry at Newman and I. [He was angry] because we were trying to say no we should not go on strike; it is very difficult, and we do not have the resources [to sustain it]. 'You can never know how long a strike takes, we could be out for a long time and that does not mean that we will win.'

We were trying to have them come with different ways [to deal with the employer], and before we took the vote, Javier got very angry at us and just walked out of the meeting and said: "Look I have had it," and I said: "Wait a second, hold on, we [should] take a vote." He just walked out for a [few moments], and then later on came back and they voted [to go on strike]. Months later [during] the strike Javier told me, --he said: "Alicia, next time I say I want to go on strike, beat me up; you were right Newman and you. Now we are the ones who voted [to go on strike]; now we are going to stick-it out."

Q: Since you had prior knowledge about strikes by working with the farm workers, you probably knew how hard a strike can be. Why did they decide to do it? Did they see the strike as a novelty thing, or did they try to scare the employer because they were skilled workers? Can you discuss how they arrived at that decision?
A: Workers viewed the strike as [irrepaclable] skilled workers, they said: 'We are very skilled workers. If we withdraw our labor that employer cannot make any money.' In a sense they were right. They could not be as easily replaced as le's say, PSGF workers who packed [fish] and could have been easily replaced. It is true the Calliope Designs employer lost lots of money, but still he was able to [meet his production demands] through scabs, even though [production] was not the best quality. The workers thought they could win the strike because they said: 'We are real talented, skilled [workers]. This kind of work takes a lot [of time to learn], and not anybody can do it.' [Workers said]: "It would take lots of training for somebody to get to our level, and truly, scabs could not do this kind of work."

The company still lost a lot of money, and I think the employers ended up working and doing some of the stuff, some of the ornaments. But still [the impact on the employer] was not enough. Because it is not the same having twenty-one workers withdraw their labor, as having one-thousand workers withdrawing their labor. But still it was a successful strike [with relative gains]. We got what we wanted. [But], like I said, we did not get the most critical thing the workers wanted which was union security.

Q: They went on strike, and did not get one hundred percent of what they wanted. That happens often in labor negotiations. But can you discuss more in detail what their demands were?

A: When we were negotiating, we asked for a union shop, respect for seniority, paid vacation, certain holidays, wage increases, [and] I think grievance process. Just what you would have in a [labor] contract. The employer was willing to give us some things, but not everything. He did not what to give us a lot. After being in negotiations for so many months, the workers,—and I do not remember how many months, maybe less than six months, the workers finally said 'enough is enough.' In one of [our union] meetings, one of the workers said: 'I think we need to go out on strike because this will force the employer to sign a contract with us and to give us what we want.' Well, thirteen weeks later, we did return back to the negotiating table, and we had a mediator at that time, a federal mediator to help us with negotiations. We were not talking to each other. But then he [the employer] went back and forth [with his contract proposal] and got us closer to what we wanted. So at the end the workers
voted to end the strike. [Workers said]: "Now we got the majority [of what we wanted], but we are not going to sign the contract." And I know it is kind of unusual, but I think one of the things that Newman and I feel real proud of them. At least I am real proud of them because this union was real democratic. The workers controlled the union. They were the ones who had the power. We gave them information, but they were the ones who made the final decisions. So at the end [of the strike] we went back [to work].

Q: I understand that union members were paying, dues and you had the union well organized. Did you and Newman continue volunteering your time?

A: Both Newman and I were working as volunteers during this whole time, and then during the time of PSGF too. We worked for the union, I would say, a year and a half volunteering --almost two years. We both had full time jobs, Newman and I. At that time I was working for California Human Development cooprporation (CHDC), and I was a supervisor. I was in charge of immigration. Newman was investigating legal cases for attorneys.

Q: How did you find the time to work full time and do all the extra union work?

A: Well, we did it. We used to get time during that time. Newman's schedule was more flexible [than mine]. He would cover certain shifts at the picket line, and I would do them on the weekends, or in the evenings. Also, [in the evenings] we would have meetings with the workers, talk to them, [we] call them up giving them reassurance, or have meetings. Later on, I even ended up helping a lot of workers with their immigration stuff, papers. But that would be after hours like at night. Sometimes I would get home at 11:00 p.m. or 12:00 a.m. at night. We [usually] worked in the union until 10:00 p.m. at night.

Q: Was all your work during those hours union related, or helping workers with immigration forms?
A: It was regarding the workers, it was for them. I ended up helping some of the workers do their papers [for immigration] because they did not have the money to go pay someone to do their immigration papers. So I would help. But we did not have time. It was a twenty-four hours thing for Newman and I—working, the union, [etc.]

Q: At this time when you and Newman were already very involved in the union. What were the other members of the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC) doing? Were they participating in the union activities?

A: Yes, some people would go with the workers to different organizations. For example, there were some people in LLEC who belonged to other organizations in the community, so they would take worker to their organization's meetings. They would help make flyers, they would be there people who did the news releases.

Q: Did you divide yourselves into committees?

A: During Calliope Designs we did not do that much. We were all of us kind of together to help each other in whatever way, be at the picket lines and arrange the rallies, or whatever. During Calliope Designs, LLEC [led] the division of work. Later on, when we started with PSGF, we ended up having different people head different committees, and the reason was because in PSGF we had a hundred-and-fifty people, almost two-hundred workers. That is when we started to divide the labor among ourselves.

Q: It was not until PSGF that you started organizing yourselves into committees? How did you divide all your activities? What happened after the strike was over? How did the workers feel about the strike when it was not what they originally really wanted?

A: The workers felt really powerful, especially because during that time Paulina's case was won, [well] a little bit later, so that gave them even more power. When they went back to work there were bad feelings for a while. There was a lot of tension among the employer and [the workers], [because] we had been out there yelling at each other for thirteen weeks.
Q: How were the relations between workers who did not go on strike and those who did?

A: There were not too many [workers] that stayed inside [working], and so there were probably only three people that stayed inside. The majority of the strikers felt strong. They did not feel like they were walking into a bad situation. But, I think, the tension was between the employer and the workers because they had to kind of soften their relationship a little bit. And they did eventually. But whenever the employer would do anything to one of the workers, all the workers would get up and go to the employer's office together. So there was always that protection. The workers never let just one person just kind of go by himself [to talk to the employer]. There would be one, or two, or three [workers accompanying him]. Or, all of them would get up and go if something was difficult [to deal with]. The employer began to see that there was such unity. My feeling is that he started to be nicer and more respectful to the workers [after the strike].

Q: Even though he was nice and respectful, did he change his ideas about the union? Did he give the workers what they wanted?

A: No, we never got union security. But the workers behaved as if there was a contract. Their attitude [a positive one, they said]: "We are the union, and we already got what we wanted." Workers paid dues, although they did not have the employer deduct [them] from their checks. They used to come and bring them [to the union hall]. One of the workers was the treasurer, so they gave [the money for the dues] to her. They viewed themselves [as], "We are a union, [and] we have a contract." They viewed themselves as though having everything. In a sense it was very successful in that way.

One of the things that was also developed during this process that I thought was very good when we started organizing was [the shop steward process]. One person was like the shop steward. There was one person in charge for that week [or month] at each [working] table. The workers worked at different tables, they sat as a group. There were five or six tables in different groups. Each week or month, [they rotated a representative from each table]. If there was a worker's grievance, if there was something coming up, a problem, each table had one representative [to deal with that problem]. What was interesting, at the beginning, is that [among couples] the husbands [wanted to take over]
their wives' turn when they were the representatives for their table. [Male] workers would say: "I will do it." They were very protective of their wives, and I [would] say 'No, you cannot do that. Each person has to develop the ability to stand up and defend not only their rights but other people's rights.' In a sense, we started developing a shop steward system. In a way that helped later on when the workers went back [to work]. If there was a problem with the employer, the representative [of the person's table] would go with the person who was having the problem.

Q: During your previous interview you mentioned that workers made Christmas ornaments, and they went back to work in the middle of October. Did they have sufficient work? You also mentioned that they worked piece rate. Did they obtain a raise for piece rate?

A: They got a raise on certain ornament--depending on the complexity or the simplicity of it. The pay was raised on some ornaments. In other words, they did get a raise on some ornaments and not on others. But, they did get an overall raise.

Q: What happened to the scabs when the workers went back to work?

A: I think most of them left. They were fired or laid off by the employer. I think almost everybody was gone.

Q: Lets leave Calliope Designes for a while, and lets talk about PSGF. During Calliope Designs' organizing efforts, PSGF workers became involved. Did you invite them to participate in the union?

A: We had a victorious election at Calliope Designs. Some of the workers at Calliope Designs had family members at PSGF, and they became aware of the fact that Calliope Desgins had won its election. Workers were ready to start contract negotiations. PSGF workers found out we were successful. I got to check when exactly all of these [events] happened. When did we start negotiating? I am not really sure. I just have to look at certain dates. When we were on strike, did we start organizing PSGF? What happened is that, at PSGF, some of those family members called us and said, "We would like to meet with you and find what we need to do to have a union." Celia Mendoza worked at PSGF,
and she was Fina's sister. Fina worked at Calliope Designs. There was a group of PSGF workers that called us. It was not just family members but other workers like Julieta and Francisca who wanted to meet with us. And we said okay. I think we just met with a few of them, maybe four or five of them. And we said to them, "If you are really interested in this, here is a union election petition." That petition read: "Yes, I want to join SCIU, and I want for SCIU to represent me in wages and hours." What we ended up doing, we said to the committee: "If you are interested in joining the union find out if other workers are willing to sign this petition. But you have to do it in secret, and you have to be very careful if they want the union or not." We were really surprised at how quickly the workers said yes. They wanted a union; they signed the petition. [After the petition was signed] we had a big meeting.

Q: Calliope Designs employed twenty-one or twenty-three workers, they knew each other, and worked in a very closed setting, and the employer had no experience with union organizing. How was this different from PSGF? What kind of industry was PSGF? How many workers were employed at PSGF? And how was the racial breakdown at PSGF?

A: PSGF is a fish and processing company, and the kind of jobs the workers did was, fileeing, cutting, packing, and storing fish.

Q: Did Mexicans drive the company's trucks?

A: No, that was another group, I think that the truck drivers were represented by the Teamsters.

Q: Were the drivers employed by the same company?

A: No, I do not think, the [truck drivers] were represented, but they --in a sense, we considered them from a different industry and we never organized them. We considered them to be part of another union jurisdiction, so we did not organize them. But they were not unionized. Because I just remember --if they were unionized, they would have help us [in our struggle] in solidarity. So PSGF probably employed a hundred-and-fifty to two-hundred workers. Ninety five percent [of the
workers] were Latinos. I would say that five percent were probably Portuguese. The supervisors were all Portuguese. There were very few other workers from other [racial backgrounds], but I think five percent would be Portuguese and that was it.

Q: You are saying that none of these workers were unionized?

A: No, as a matter of fact, PSGF had been in Santa Rosa for about forty years and, as a matter of fact. When I was a teenager in high school, I worked there during the time when they used to [process] shrimp. For me it was a wonderful thing to come back out here later, years later. I think twenty years later, to come back and organize PSGF workers.

workers at PSGF did not have health insurance, paid holidays, they were paid very bad, [and they had] no seniority [rights, retirement rights?]. They also had to pay for [their protective gear]; uniform, gloves, boots, etc. So this particular company did not provided any benefits to workers.

Q: Given all that, what happened during your first meeting after the committe gathered all the signatures?

A: I would say when we first met, we had maybe eighty people [who] came to the first meeting. We [Newman and I] were very shocked to see [all those workers coming to the meeting]. We had gotten a place were Newman and I used to live, a [meeting] room and it was packed. People had to be outside because [the place] was so packed. At that time we talked to them again, many of them had already signed the petition. But we said, we want to make sure that you understand what this means, and what it means joining the union.

Q: The workers at PSGF were not happy because they had no benefits at all, and some people had been working there for several years, is that right?

A: No [Yes], the one that was there the longest, had been twenty-one years and that was Celia Mendoza. There were others who had been there for ten or fifteen years. These were long term workers, because as I mentioned, this particular company had been in Santa Rosa for forty years or so.
Q: After you had been working with Calliope Designs workers and you had observed that the working conditions were bad. If you were to compare the working conditions between both places, what would be the worst?

A: I think PSGF probably had the worst [working] conditions because they did not have as many benefits, and also they had to pay for their [protective gear] and the working conditions [were bad] --they worked in water, and the water was real cold when they [took the fish] out, [of the bucket]. Even though they wore boots, they got wet. It still some of the workers could not afford $20.00 to $30.00 [for a pair of] boots. Sometimes they would get infections and things in their legs because fish is real dirty, the water [was also dirty] also when people got hurt [during their working hours], PSGF [management] did not care as much about people. You know, if you cut yourself with a knife, [management response was]: 'Oh well, just put a band-aid there' or whatever. Unless it was very severe, they may have taken [the worker] to the doctor. So the [working] conditions were worst, I would say at PSGF. Because workers in both [companies] used their arms so much in fast rapid movement, they suffered carpal tunnel because they used their arms so much. I wold say, yes. The [working] condition were worst at PSGF.

To go back to the first meeting, because I think we did not finish talking about that. The first meeting we got about eighty workers that came to the meeting, I remember being a lot of workers.
Alicia Sanchez. Union Organizer. Third interview. October 17, 1995

Q: In our last interview we stop talking about the Point Saint George Fisheries (PSGF) workers coming to you to request that you represent them in their collective bargaining?

A: In that meeting there were about, I would say eighty workers that showed up. And what happened, by then some of them had already collected petitions because before this meeting we had already met with a committee, a group of, maybe five women at PSGF. And we said to them. If there is an interest, we would like for you to have the rest of the workers sign this petition. So the women went and got signatures, a lot of signatures. Then we called our first meeting. This is the meeting that it seemed like eighty, but they brought their families.

Q: Do you recall who those five women were?

A: I think it was Julieta del Campo, Celia Mendoza, Carmen Mendoza. I think it may have been Fancisca Bejar, and there had to be another woman. Who was the other woman? I am not sure about the last one. I do not even think Susana was involved at the very beginning. But anyway, so we had this meeting. There were a lot of people there I remember. The whole room, this was a very big room, and it was packed. People with their families. They brought their kids and everything else. Then we asked them all the questions that we had asked Calliope Designs. But we added one more [thing]. We talked about what it would take to organize. It is a long struggle, but things get changed. Then we said. "You have to love each other, you have to accept each other differences. Once you start the struggle, you have to finish it, and you have to turn and look at the person next to you and say 'I am willing to lose my job for you." So people did that and they said yes that they will do it. Then we all started clapping and cheering. It looked [like] the whole room was going [to] fall apart because it was so loud, the noise. It was a beautiful day!

Q: Did you have the meeting at the Carpenters union? Were they lending you an office?
A: No, at that point we were meeting in a place where we used to live, like a big community room. Newman [Strawbridge] and I used to live there. We lived in a cooperative, so we borrowed their meeting room.

Q: How were the workers contacting you? Were they calling you on your private phone at home?

A: Yes, Calliope Designs workers would meet in our living room. When we had the meeting for PSGF, because it was such a big group, we used the community room at the coop.

Q: Alicia, when did these meetings happened? In relation to Calliope Designs organizing. Before the strike? During the organizing campaign for the election?

A: I think it was probably at the end, in the middle of the....no we had not yet started the strike. But we already had the election at Calliope Designs. It was after the election at Calliope Designs.

Q: Was the organizing of Calliope Designs workers so successful that PSGF workers decided to organize?

A: That is how the workers at PSGF, when they found out that Calliope Designs had won the elections and everything else, the workers at PSGF came.

Q: At that time you also had support from community members, community groups such as peace groups, and other unions in Sonoma County?

A: Yes, we had support from other trade unionists, from labor, from other unions like the carpenters, like [the laborers and], the postal workers. During Calliope Designs we mostly had community people, a little bit of labor, you know like the Carpenters, the United Food and Commercial Workers helped us a lot in Calliope Designs. But in PSGF we expanded our support because we had more workers, and we needed more help from the community and from other unions. That is when we went to the postal workers, to the, even the Teamsters—even the Teamsters [it is] true. I know that
because when I first met them, when I worked with the United Farm Workers, they used to be against us. It was interesting how we had come around. At PSGF we went and asked for more community support, and that is when we were more actively seeking support like in the peace groups, the gay and lesbians groups, women's groups, African American.

Q: So you had a wider representation of groups. Were they present at your first PSGF meeting?

A: No, they were not. The first meeting we had [with] PSGF [workers], it was all workers only. It was later, when we did our first action at PSGF to ask for recognition.

Q: What did you do in your first action?

A: The first action that I remember, first we had a meeting, I think we ended having a little bit more meetings. Then we said what we needed to do, is now make sure again the same thing we did with Calliope Designs, we need to get these workers protected. For them to get protected, we have to ask for recognition from the company, volunteering recognition. We were hoping that the company would recognize the union without having to go through an election. So we planned a big rally at PSGF and that is when we asked a lot of people to come. We ended up having like around maybe 300 to 400 people. Because there was about a 150 workers or so, plus their families. and then we ended up having 200 or so people from the community.

Q: How did you organize all the workers since they worked different shifts?

A: I do not know if there was a shift at night? Yes there was a shift at night, it was mostly men working with the shellfish. So what we did, was to plan a march. We gathered all the community people to come at certain time that we would be able to cover both shifts, you know? the day shift and the night shift. So the workers would see.

Q: So it was during the day?
A: It was around noon or so, because I almost got into trouble with my work. What they did is that they [the press] quoted me, [the press] quoted me saying [things, representing my work]. They put the place where I worked, so it looked [like] that was the place that was organizing.

So what happened, we did a noon rally, and we went into the plant, walked inside the plant, all of us, community and workers. And we asked for recognition. And that was the first time the employer actually knew that there was an organizing driving going on. And, of course, they said that no, they did not want to recognize it. And that they had to talk to their lawyers and all of that. So then after that, I do not know how long after that we [went] again to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to have an election.

Q: Do you remember how many people signed the petition to have an election?

A: I would say almost 90 to 95 percent. Almost everybody.

Q: Could you describe your campaign for collective bargaining representation?

A: What we did was mostly, from the time we filed in the first rally, to the time we had the election, mostly what we were doing [was] having meetings with workers and [getting] them ready for the employers campaign. We said, the employers are going to try [to] frighten all of you. They are going to have captive audience meetings. They are going to try to buy you all, and give you benefits and all that. So we prepared the workers, and at the same time what we started to show the workers unity among themselves. So people bought buttons to show unity. They all would wear tee-shirts. Here they did not have to have a uniform of any kind, so they all wore tee-shirts that showed the fish, you know. The big fish and the little fish. And it said "Organize." We also had some noon rallies, just regular picket-lines, until the election happened. I think as it got closer to the election we also did house visits. We went and visited the workers at their homes. We tried to just visit as many people as we could. To go into their homes and ask them if they had questions regarding what it meant
to vote, what a union mean, and things like that. Because we [used] to have meetings, long meetings with PSGF, like three hours long. Also asking for support in the community being on the radio, going to churches, whatever, just to talk about our struggle.

Q Did you form committees to go to the media, churches, etc.? Or how did you organize yourselves?

A: Right, in our meetings, we would break after we had a certain amount of general membership meeting. Then we would break up into committee meetings. By then Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC) members became more involved and people would head the committees because they had more experience dealing with committees than the workers did. There would be like a fundraising committee, one going to community organizations, one going to churches, one passing out leaflets at churches or markets, etc.

Q Now lets change gears for a moment. If you were to compare the workers from Calliope Designs and PSGF, which group do you think would have more political experience, and in union organizing?

A: I think probably PSGF did. And the reason PSGF did is because most of them came from one state, and that was Michoacan. And Michoacan historically has been more, I guess, political or more militant, I think, I do not know. But it seemed that this particular group of people, from [that] state were much more active. They were willing to take more risk than the others, I would say. For some reason. I just think it is because they came from the State of Michoacan. And then, later on, that was the state too, that produced Cardenas. And so it seemed like the people there were more active. I do not know, if some of them, maybe a few [were] involved in unions, but still they had a little bit more experience that Calliope Designs did.

Q According to your memories, PSGF workers were more militant, were willing to take more risks?
A: Yes, the way I would describe PSGF workers is that they came from probably a state [where] they were more oppressed. So it forced them to be more political, more militant, more involved in struggle. And they had more experience in unionizing. But I also found out that in that group many of them did not even know how to read and write. There were some people who could not read and write in Spanish. And there [were] a lot more people that [were] not educated, formal education I should say, at PSGF. Calliope Designs it seemed like [the] people there even knew how to use some English. They [had] been longer in the United States, not so much longer, but they had picked-up skills here, and they also came from states in Mexico [where there was] not as much political unrest as the people from PSGF who came from the State of Michoacan. Even though they started the union they were not as militant, I noticed, and willing to take as many risks. Well is hard to say that because they took the risk of [going on] strike. But it seemed that overall PSGF were more militant.

Q: Going back to the campaign for an election, did you prepare them for the voting time?

A: One of the things that I think in Both, Calliope Designs and PSGF that we did, [was that] we spent a lot of time educating, teaching the workers, so that they knew as much as we did, so they would understand the laws here, so they would understand how the voting went. We would let them know how the campaign was going. Part of that process of informing, teaching them was that we showed them how the election process was going to happen on that particular day. We did it at Calliope Designs, but at PSGF it took us longer. What we did is that we role played. We did the whole [thing]; we did like a mock election. We got one worker to pretend he was the company, first. And then there was another worker for the company's observer. We got somebody to be the NLRB; another one was the worker's observer. We went through it exactly. We did ballots, we showed them exactly--because as I mentioned there were people who did not know how to read and write. So we had to show them what they had to look for and how to vote and all that. It took us like a few hours. We made every person vote, and we counted the votes and everything else. So we did like a mock election.
Q: Do you think that helped them to understand the electoral process for a union election?

A: It is interesting, the other organizer, Newman kept saying, we [did] not need to go through the mock election. "Lets just tell them how to vote." That this is the way you vote. But I think it was important that we went through every little thing, exactly like how it was going to happen on the election day. And I think it was really helpful; it really made people feel like there [were] not surprises. They were not scared. They realized that they did have to bring their I.D. They just walked in, voted, and walked out.

Q: I want to ask you this question, because when people read this, they will ask themselves if you were treating the workers in a condescending or patronizing way just because they were Mexicans. And, would you have the same mock election if they were white workers?

A: Yes. My attitude as an organizer is that I do that even with English speaking, white workers. I do the whole thing because I am an organizer, and I do this every single day, the same thing. [It] is the same routine with every campaign. With me whether you are [a] Spanish speaker or [an] English speaker, or whether you are born in the U.S. or not, you still, as a worker you have not had the experience of dealing in this area. I like, for people, to teach them everything I know about the law, about the way an election is held. What the NLRB means, how long [it] is going to take...I think [it] is very important for workers. By the end of the union campaign whether you win or lose an election is not as important as whether you learned something new. How to defend your rights for the next time. My attitude is to teach them. And we did not have that [condescending] attitude, I feel that none of us who were the organizers at that time, none of us, treated these workers as [if] they were less than us. And I do not think that we treated them in a condescending or patronizing way. None of that, I do not think so. I think all of us, [as] a matter of fact, [we] were learning at the same time. It just so happened that some of us had a little bit more experience and more knowledge. So we would pass it on to somebody else. Even then there were some workers who knew
about organizing in Mexico. Yet in Mexico [it] is a little different. In Mexico you do not cross a picket line. Here you do it; they were a little surprised.

Q Your meetings were also educational. You taught them the differences between Mexico and the United States?

A: More important we were trying to make sure that they knew exactly what the company was going to do. I think [it] is very important for workers, if you let them know exactly what the company is going to do in a campaign so that they are ready for it, so that they do not think is going to be an easy struggle.

Q What kind of campaign did PSGF use to prevent workers for voting for a union?

A: They hired Littler and Mendelson, a law firm. What PSGF did is more fight us in the legal area, by delaying the process. It took eventually one year for us to get certified. Because they made a decision to concentrate in the legal area they did not spent as much time internally campaigning. For example, they did not hire a union-busting consultant, which I sort of expected for them to hire one. In some companies they normally get together with the managers and start showing the managers, informing them. "This is what you need to do to the workers," show them different areas in how to bust the union. PSGF management did not do any of that. Mostly they were shocked. I think they were shocked that workers were so many and so unified [that] they did not do as much of a campaign, I think they once offered one or two persons money to try to change people. They gave a party or something like that.

Q Is it not true that PSGF offered Celia Mendoza a supervisor's position, a thing that they never did before? Celia had been working there for over twenty five years, and she was active in the union?

A: Celia Mendoza who was the oldest worker there, and who was very active in the union was offered to be promoted to a supervisor, and what Celia did, she came and spoke to all of us. She brought it to the attention of the workers in the meeting, and
the other members said, "well it is up to her to make that decision." She asked me what will happened if she decided to become a supervisor. I told her that after that she could no longer be in the meetings any more. At that time we still had not voted: we still had not the election. But I told her if that happened she was out of the union campaign. So she decided not to take the promotion, even though it would have meant more money. And she deserved it because she was the oldest worker, and she knew that. So she decided not to do it.

Q: Was it a key action against the union from the bosses to promote her?

A: Yes, my feeling about the reason they wanted to promote her at this particular time, she was qualified for that position, she had been qualified for years, but the reason they choose this particular time was because she was a key worker organizer for the campaign. And, if she decided to become a supervisor then they could have more control of her they could use her to follow their orders. So they probably were going to use her against her own co-workers to break the union. The reason I am saying that is because I just recently organized another group of workers, and they did the same thing. The key organizer, worker organizer, was offered a job as manager. And the only reason they are doing it is because then, in that way, they can use you against other workers. And then if you do not work out, they can fire you, and you do not have any recourse in the law.

Q: By this time you had had a few meetings and how was the participation of the workers, because women were the majority of the workers, and many had husbands. How did women take the leadership, if they took it?

A: Well at PSGF there were probably, the union there, the bargaining union, the majority, I would say 75% were women. At first a lot of them did want to turn over the leadership to men, the 25 percent, and we said no. Especially someone like Newman and myself, we both felt like...I think Newman said: "This union will be 75 percent stronger or 25 percent weaker" because, if we allowed the women to take secondary roles, we had weakened the whole
union completely. So we made sure that the women took the leadership, constantly, and they did not want to. One of the things I think I felt was very important is that we involved the families. This was not just the worker involvement, it meant their husbands, their wives, their children. So they all would come to the meeting. What I would do, is that I went and spoke to their husbands. As much as I could, I went and spoke to some of the husbands and invited them to come to the meetings. I also told them they had more experience than their wives, that we needed them for support, that we needed them to help their wives out. In this way I also included them more, so that they would not feel threatened. Many of these women did not have their husbands working in the same jobs. Like [at] Calliope Designs, you had both couples there. But in PSGF for a lot of women, their husbands worked someplace else. So because of that it was very strange for the husband to find out that his wife was no longer going to be there when he got home and be cooking. Either [that or] to be cooking dinner real fast to get to a meeting at 7:00 p.m. So the husbands got to start to feel threatened. Some of these people I did go to their homes and talked to them and invited [them] to come to the meetings, to bring their wives, and all that. And there was also a lot of distrust from the husbands. Their wives would not only know more about life than they did but also...where they really at meetings or were they going someplace else? A lot of the husbands would make sure that the wives brought the children with them. So there was all this distrust, and it was very hard for the women, very, very hard. Many of them went through very hard times, but they kept going. Many of them said, this was very important in their lives. it was amazing the courage of these women. The courage of these women to have to fight at home, to be allowed to go to meetings and be involved in activities and, then, at the same time for them to be having to deal at work, you know, with their boss.

Q: When you described the women who did not want to take the leadership, was that the majority of women? Or were only few women in this situation? Were there very militant women despite the fact that their husbands opposed their union activities?

A: At the beginning--the women who were the leadership--the ones that started the committee, there was a group of them [who
were married]. And some of them were single parents, like Susana Garcia. There were some women who were single parents, who did not have husbands, and yet they were shy to take the leadership, they did not want to take the leadership. So they would say "no [when they were assigned to do a job]. Let the men do that, let the men control the meetings, let the men get up and go to talk to organizations." And we would say no! We cannot do that. We are not going to allowed that kind of thing, you have to get up and do a meeting, you have to take notes. you have to chair a meeting. I tried to get some of them to chair a meeting, or a committee, or go to organizations with me and speak.

Q: How about the Mendoza sisters, and Francisca Bejar? Were they militant? Or did they want for men to do all the organizing?

A: At first, this particular group, the committee, were shying away from leadership. Even though they were the ones who started the organizing campaign. They wanted to kind of saying: "Let the men take the leadership." And these were the women who were actually the leaders of the group! And we did not allow that. So, instead, they did become the leaders of the group at the end, for example, at the end when we did the ratify vote. Years later, two or three years later, when we were to ratified our contract, the first contract, the people who were in that meeting were all women. No men. So it was the women who survived the three years struggle. And as I mentioned, even when they had the double pressuring than the men did.

Q: Going back to the election vote for the union at PSGF, how were the voting results, and what happened after the election?

A: Yes it was like a 120 to 12. And it was incredible, it was beautiful. This was different from Calliope Designs. We were certified as a union right away. The company [Calliope Designs] did not object to the election. On the contrary, PSGF had hired Littler and Mendelsen, which is a very anti-union law firm. The minute we found out the company had hired them, we told the workers: 'What is going to happen, they are going to challenge the elections, even though there was a landslide, they are going to challenge it, and they are going to object to it. They are going to challenge it by
finding a lot of objection. And they did it. They filed over 60 objections. It was a lot. And what happened is that we let the workers know right away. We said, "This is what is going to happen, we are going to have a hearing and go through all these objections the company had, so it is going to be a long time by the time we get certified." And sure enough, it took one year to get certified.

Q: Did you prepare the workers about these results in advance, during the elections campaign? How did the workers respond to the company's objections?

A: Right, even though you tell a worker ahead of time that this is going to happen, that the company is going to object and appeal the legal system, it takes so long, even if you tell a worker ahead of time that this is it. I think all of us, including ourselves as organizers, we still hoped that the company [would] not do it. And that, at the last minute, they [would] not take us [down] this long road. Newman and I had dealt with this law firm before when we worked with the farm workers and so, because of that, we knew right a way that they were going [to do it]. Not even this particular lawyer, we knew the law firm. And we told right away the workers: They are going to object, they are going to be in court for a long time and it will take us about a year! And, sure enough, it took us exactly a year.

Q: Can you discuss what you did to prepare the workers for the hearings, and were the hearings where held at?

A: For the hearing, mostly what we did is we would have meetings, and [we] told the workers: "We are going to have a court day, and this is what is going to happen." But the preparation came mostly from the witnesses. We had to get certain workers to testify. We ourselves in the meetings, we asked for key people. We of course went for the leaders to be the ones to give testimony. But, we also asked if people were willing to volunteer, to give testimony, and then we found out what testimony they could give. But when you prepare a witness, you usually try to find who saw what, who can contradict the company. For example, the company, well the company always says that we forced people, that the
union coerced people into voting, that we scared them and that we forced them to vote for the union. So we had to get workers up there and say "no," I volunteered for the union, I was never coerced, and all this kind of stuff. So, we had to get witnesses to contradict that allegation by the company.

Q  There was also the accusation from the company that there was some type of money collection happening inside the plant to support the election campaign?

A:  I think they used that. They said that we were giving the workers money, some benefits, because what happened right away we did the recognition rally at PSGF. They laid-off 20 workers, and they were predominately men. So in this way, what it was, it was trying to divide, the men against [the] women. And so what happened is that we did a fundraising at that time, and we lent people money, or there [were] donations. So the company used that to say that we bought those workers, that the money that we gave to those laid-off workers was in order for them to vote for the union for us to buy votes. So we had to get those workers to say "No," we did not. "The donation was not directly to us. They did not give us the money to buy our votes."

Q  Laying-off workers became a regular practice from the company to discourage them to vote for the union?

A:  I think yes, not so much laying-off, but cutting hours, was one way that the company. So, this way, they would be able to discourage the workers.

Q  Where was the company sending the fish to be processed, if they did cut the workers' hours? Did they have another company?

A:  That particular campaign of cutting hours and laying-off workers came after the election was won. And while we were trying to get negotiations, or certification, they started to lay-off workers, or cut hours. At one point, we were following the trucks to find out where they were taking the fish to be cut and we found out that they were taking them far north, like all the way to Oregon. That is why it did not make any sense to us.
Q: Is it not true that the owners of PSGF owned more plants in Oakland, California and Oregon?

A: They had one in Oakland. That is right. They had the main one, I think, processing. And also, not the main one, I am sorry, this was the main one here. But they had another one were they packed and shipped, I am not sure, in Oakland. They also had some in Oregon. And all of those plants, but this particular plant, [Bulgaro owned] the other ones were unionized under the Food and Commercial Workers, except this one. One of the things that was interesting was that in the one in Oregon and the one in Oakland, the majority of the workers were predominately white. And this one, that was the main one here at Santa Rosa for processing, or the largest I should say it was predominately Mexican. That was one of the things that was found out that the company in many ways was racist. They did not want to allow Mexican workers to unionize because they did not want to pay them [the] same wages.

Q: Did you ever seek support from the other plants' workers?

A: We did that later, no [we] did not do it because they were so far away. The ones in Oakland were very few. But, later on, when we did our contract campaign we did talk to the workers at, I think in Oakland, a little bit-- just to try to get their support.

Q: Did they have a small shop in Point Saint Reyes?

A: No I did not know about that.

Q: The Company was then, used to dealing with unions?

A: This owner had experience working with unions, but he was still anti-union. And, definitely, the lawyers he hired had experience with unions. Where the lawyer that Calliope Designs hired, I do not think he had much experience with unions or the labor. So that means [it] is even harder sometimes. Sometimes [it] is better to deal with companies and lawyers who had experience even if it is bad experience with unions. But at least if they had experience, you know what to expect from them.
Q: How was the workers' morale after they had to wait for certification and go to the hearing?

A: It was hard because... I look back and I think how in the world did we do two or three years of keeping the campaign going and everything going. There were moments when there was not activity happening because, sometimes, I think Newman and I were involved with Calliope Designs so then sometimes we would sort of put PSGF on hold for a little bit, and then we would come back and try to do activities with PSGF workers. A lot of what we did with PSGF workers was have rallies outside and have lunches the same as we did with Calliope Designs. We never went out on strike with PSGF, but what we did was just keep having rallies and marches. We did a very big march, a very big one just before the election, so that helped the workers. And then afterwards we had to do small rallies, just to keep the morale of the workers up while we waited for the court day. And then when we had the court day, people just went and testified. It was kind of quiet not too many activities. But the main way that we kept the morale up was for us to do rallies for the workers. It is the same way that they did to unify--wear tee-shirts, wear something that said: "We still [are] unified, we still."

Q: How were the workers being treated by the employer after the election, besides cutting hours, and cutting down on work?

A: I do not think we had any firings. There were some firings, but I am not sure if they were union related. Because of that, it was mostly that sometimes people did something like-- I remember there were some-- I do not know at what point the Dominguez brothers were fired--Ruben was fired for nothing and then Carmelo. I think all of them came after the election and after we got certified. I think it was when we were starting the contract negotiations. Because what happened after we got certified...

Q: You went to the hearing, then you were certified?

A: It took a long time, months. And then finally we got the decision from the NLRB saying that we got certified. Now what the company... The next recourse the company had to do, was to appeal
to the Ninth Circuit Court. By then we already had gone to the high level of the NLRB. When they came back a year later we had now officially been certified by the Washington DC, what they called Administrative Appeal. The company had done the Administrative Appeal. The NLRB came back and said: "This election was valid, the union is certified." The company then was going to decide whether to appeal to the courts, and what we did was that at that time we decided that we would tell the company that we would do a boycott. So we went to the lawyers of the company and said: If you decide to fight us in the court we initiate a boycott of this company. We sort of threatened them with the boycott, and said that we would increase our pressure on the company, we would do more activities in front of the company, we would do it outside. We would do a boycott, and we actually did, one started out, by going over for example in front of some of the stores and telling customers not to buy PSGF to make sure, so we started that kind of campaign, so that the company would know that we were serious.

Q: Was their image becoming negative?

A: The boycott was against PSGF, never against a store. So when we were in front of the store, we told people: "yes go in and shop; the boycott is not against the store, it is against PSGF, because that is considered a secondary boycott and that is against the law." So we said: "The boycott is not against the store or the restaurant. It is against this particular product PSGF fish."

Q: In what stores were they selling their products?

A: It was Safeway and G and G market. We did one picket line at G and G market. I remember that for sure. Then what happened, we talked to the lawyers and said: "If you decide to appeal to the court and prolong this, we make sure we do a very serious boycott." So it is then when the company came back and said: "No we will not appeal any further, and so let's sit down and talk about negotiations."

Q: Do you remember the date?

A: It was probably 1990-1991. Then we started negotiations,
and we negotiated with them for a while, but the only thing is that they did give very little wages. The wages were not a very high increase. But they gave some insurance to the workers, and holidays. We won also a law suit against them for the equipment. So the company ended up paying for the equipment. They did have to pay retroactive for whatever equipment the uniform, like boots, knives, gloves, etc. So some of the workers...that was a sort of victory and that kept the morale going because they got some money, you know the workers got some money back. And then the thing that I think was the hardest was that in the contract they could not keep the union security and at the [time] we lost that one. Because of that, when we signed the contract, before we signed it we started collecting signatures to do a boycott. And we presented a whole bunch of signatures to the company showing them that, if they did not sign a contract, we will soon--I had like a big pile of sheets of petitions that I went and showed to the company, and said: "All these people are interested in starting a boycott of your fish."

Q: Who were these people?

A: We did a campaign of door-to-door talking to people in the neighborhoods like Roseland, South Park and others. We tried stores and things like that. We asked people to boycott their products. So, we were able to collect a lot, a lot of signatures. Thousands [of signatures]. And then we also had unions sign the petitions saying that they would get their memberships to boycot the products. So we presented it to the company. All these people are going out and boycotting your products. We were going to do a massive rally in Oakland and so, because of all that, it finally got to the company. We said that we were going to disrupt their business in Oakland, and so--Oh, Newman ended up going all the way to Oregon and that is when he got in contact with those people in Oregon and said that the company knew that we were very actively doing things to have a serious boycot. We followed the trucks just to get them upset. Finally it was not until three years later that the company agreed to sign a contract. On that day that we signed the contract, as I mentioned all the people who were present were all women.
And we signed it. And we voted to have a contract. So three years later. We voted among the workers, whether they accepted or not the contract. It was not the best contract because they had to come from nothing to just up. So the raises were not very high at all, as much as we would have liked to got them. But they got vacation, they got holidays, and had some insurance, seniority. There was going to be more work for the senior workers before they hired anybody else.

Q: Around this time, were you and Newman continued volunteering your time?

A: No. The last year, I would say the last year and a half, we went for a year and a half volunteering, then we realized it was so much work that we could not keep both jobs. We both had a child and then still doing full-time volunteer. So what happened at one point we [contacted or the] Service Employees International Union (SEIU) contacted us and they said that they would [be interested in affiliating]. Well Newman went to see them and asked them if they would be interested if we affiliated with them. And then SCIU came and said that they would be interested in affiliating with us. For us to affiliate with them. They said they would hire us, they had a slot for two organizers. So what we did, we brought it to the workers, and we asked them if they would be willing to affiliate and if we affiliated, we also did the secret ballot vote with all the workers, and we had a priest come in.
Alicia Sanchez. Union Organizer. Fourth Interview. November 6, 1995

Q: At the end of our last interview you mentioned that a priest had come to witness and count your secret ballot vote for affiliation with Service Employees International Union (SEIU)?

A: When we decided to affiliate with SEIU we thought that it was very important for the workers at Point Saint George Fisheries (PSGF) and Calliope Designs, because they constituted the Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU), for those workers to decide if they wanted to affiliate with (SEIU) which is Service Employees International Union, and we decided to have a secret ballot election. We invited a priest to come and conduct the election and also count the ballots, [to] be there when we counted the ballots. The workers overwhelmingly decided to affiliate [with] SEIU. SEIU had offered, that there will be two paid positions, two paid organizers. We decided that the executive boards of the two units should decide, who should be the two paid organizers. Newman [Strawbridge] and I did not want to assume that it would be us. We told that to the workers. We said: it is very important if you feel that other people should --are qualified. --By now they had met a lot of other people in the struggle. We asked if [they thought] there [were] other people [that could] be the paid organizers of the union. I [thought] it was important that the executive board interview them and hire them if they felt that is important. What happened is that the workers decided that no, it should be Newman and I because we had already given about a year and a half of volunteer work. They thought it was important that we should be the paid organizers. That is what happened. At that time we became the organizers.

Q: How did it happen that you became part of SEIU? Did you approach them? Or did they come to you when they saw that Mexican workers could be organized?

A: I do not even know exactly how it worked out. Let me see? I remember my discussions with Newman about this. --I was at first against us affiliating with any union because I felt that we would get lost in the process, and the workers would not have as much say so. They would not have as much decision-making power. Once they affiliated, at first, I was against that, in my discussions with Newman. But then after a
year and a half of us both working full time and having a child and everything else, I finally said: "We cannot do this any more. I cannot do it, both of us cannot do it. One of us needs to have at least one job only." That is what I said to him. I think it would be good if we did go and ask around. What happened is that, I think Newman [asked around], or other people had heard about SCIU and had heard about us too. I do not know how it happened, whether they came and contacted us, or Newman went and talked to them. I do not know who did the initiation of that meeting. But then Newman did meet with SEIU people and the International. He made a proposal to them, and they accepted that proposal. It was with the intention that we would get a contract with PSGF and that we would do more organizing. Which is what we did. We got a contract with PSGF, and we did more organizing, that being the Calistoga workers. We lost the election there.

Q: Alicia, looking back at the affiliation issue. Do you think that SCIU got lost within the ranks of SEIU, and that is why the union died? Or were you able to continue working independently as you were in the previous year and a half?
A: No, we did. I think for the first few years, we were still independent. We had our meetings, and we had lots of decision-making power. But then. It was interesting. At the beginning we did have a lot of say so. I would say in the first two years of the affiliation. But after we got the contract at PSGF, at that time NS had left, and so I finished the negotiations at PSGF, and we got the contract. Then at that time SEIU said that they did not want us to [any] longer be affiliated with Local 707 of Santa Rosa. They felt it would be more important for us to be affiliated with Local 87 of San Francisco. And the reason was because Local 87 of San Francisco which is predominantly a janitors local, [it] had Spanish speakers, was multiracial local, and there were Spanish-speaking members. They felt that there would be more in common with that group. And that Local 707 was predominantly white service workers. So at that time, the international decided to break the affiliation with 707.

Q: Before I ask you how the workers felt about the break, let me ask you what made the workers change their minds about affiliation, since they were so clear about being an independent union?
A: I think the workers felt that they were not going to lose. When we presented the proposal to them. We said that they were not going to lose their autonomy. And, they would have decision-making power, which they did. But we also felt that the affiliation, because we gave our opinion Newman and I, that affiliation would make us stronger in Sonoma County. And that was true because we had affiliated with the service employees, and Local 707 is the largest union in Sonoma County. And so, by us affiliating with them, we would be stronger and be able to have more power. Also, I think the key was that it was the first time that you had industrial Mexican workers being union members with predominantly white service workers. And I thought that it was a historical thing to do in Sonoma County. At the end it was going to make us stronger. The workers, I think, felt it was true, and I felt it was true until we ended up being pulled to affiliate with San Francisco.

Q: Was there also some talk about hiring Paulina Martinez for the union organizing? She was unemployed, and she was a very active union member?

A: Right. She had been fired by Calliope Designs. Eventually we won that case and got her reinstated. But, during that time when we were doing the affiliation, I was working for California Human Development Corporation (CHDC). I was the head of the immigration [program] there. So, I felt bad about leaving CHDC. I am one of those persons who is very loyal, and so I felt bad about leaving. So, at one point, I proposed that Paulina become the other organizer, and I would train her. And, I would stay with CHDC. I think she turned it down. The workers felt that it should be Newman and I. What was interesting is that one of the workers said to us that the only reason he felt hesitant about having Newman and I be the organizers was because we were husband and wife, and he felt that that was going to damage our marriage. He said: "I feel that working together all the time and everything else, that is going to hurt your marriage." And we said: "No! no, no." But it eventually did. Us working together 24 hours and not devoting time to our marriage was --I think what finally caused our divorce. It was interesting. [It] was Rafael Lopez. I remember him telling us in a meeting when they voted.

At that time we affiliated [to Local] 87. What was interesting was that it was more like a unilateral decision that SEIU International made. They did not even consider 707. They sort of just said to me: "You have
Q: How did the workers feel when you told them that they had to be represented by Local 87 from San Francisco? Was that a big difference for them? Did they feel lost in Local 707? Your rules and regulations had to change in terms of dues paying, membership, etc.?

A: None of that. That is why when we affiliated with 707 it did not make a big difference. It actually was an advantage [because] we ended up having just more [things]. It did not make any difference. We did not lose our autonomy. Also the fact that Newman and I were still devoting time [helped us], we were not as stressed out because we only had one job now. But also because we ended up getting financial help from them, so that helped us a lot. [We were] able to do things --to buy equipment, to buy stuff that we did not have before, pay for an office, just have like a typewriter, a computer and stuff like that so that we could be able to work more efficiently. So our affiliation did not affect any of the way we conducted ourselves in our business there at SCIU. When we went to 87, it did not really had an effect, because I was the one that was assigned from Local 87 to service. Once you get a contract you service the workers. So I serviced the workers at PSGF for a while and also at Calliope Designs. I was still the one that was around so the workers did not feel a sense of loss at the beginning. But later on, it became more and more that I was pulled to do organizing. At first I was told that I would be organizing janitors in Santa Rosa and servicing PSGF and Calliope Designs workers. But then later on, the organizer from Marin from 87 left so they asked me to organize Marin County janitors. which I did, I organized a group of janitors there, and our contract took three months do it. It was incredible, PSGF contract, took three years, and the other one took three months.

Then it turned out that the organizer from San Francisco left, so then they pulled me to San Francisco. So I ended up organizing workers in San Francisco, organizing and servicing workers there. So it got to a point were I think by now I had been working for close to a year for Local 87. And at that time I was a single parent. my son was home most of the time, late at night. I used to live in a place where at least it was very safe. I used to live in a cooperative. So people took care of him. But when you organize janitors you have got to do it at night. That is when they work. It got to a point where it was too stressful for me. After a year of working for Local 87, I resigned, I could no longer work because the effect that it was having on my son and myself. So at that
time I left Local 87. I think it was then that the PSGF workers and Calliope Design workers suffered because Local 87 got another business rep[resentative]. They are called business reps, to come and service the workers here, at PSGF and Calliope Designs. But it was not the same, because the workers by now had been so used to being able to --You know. Anything that came up I was there to be with them. I was not just an organizer with them or a business representative. I was a friend. I was there for them for any kind of problems they had. So all of the sudden, it was very difficult for them to go and deal with this person.

Q: Why did they hire somebody else instead of keeping you here?

A: Because the whole thing, for me just to be here in Santa Rosa, there was not enough [money] --they could not afford it. In other words, the dues coming in from PSGF, which was the only one that was under contract, was very little. We still had the $10.00 a month dues structure that we had established. Even everybody paid their dues. The bad thing about PSGF, that came in the contract was that it became an open shop. So that [means] only certain members would pay dues. So it was not all of them. Even $10.00 is very little, compared to the janitors in San Francisco. They paid like $23.00. It was not enough money for me just to be caring [for the workers] in Santa Rosa. In order for them to pay me, I had to do organizing. I had to organize in San Francisco. That is when I finally resigned, because I could not do it.

They did not hire anyone new to replace me here in Santa Rosa. What they did is that someone from San Francisco, part of their additional job was to come down here and service the workers at PSGF. Not everyday, I was hoping that they would come at least once a week. But it turned out then that they would come once a month or something like that. And it was a shock to the workers who were used to having me there all the time, everyday. And so I think it was very hard for all of us. It was very hard for me to have to leave 87, and also leave PSGF.

Q: What happened to SCIU after you left and they stayed with Local 87?

A: I think it only lasted one more year because the contract was up at PSGF. But before the contract was up, Calliope Designs had already left. --closed doors here and left for Mexico. So those workers were out of a
job, and then PSGF [was] in their last year. They only lasted the three years of the contract, before the three years were up. From what I heard is that PSGF was told that they had to do a lot of renovations in their freezers and their storage because they were in violation of lots of codes. In addition, I should say, that Bulgaro [the company owner] died. I think at the end the PSGF company decided that they would just close down, I guess after 40 something years in Santa Rosa. And they closed down. What you see now is an empty lot. And it is really sad. What happened is that SCIU disappeared, no longer existed. That was it. But I think Local 87 serviced them for one year.

Q: What did you do after you left Local 87?

A: It was wonderful. For the next two months I stayed home. It was my only vacation. For my son, if you ask him, he would probably remember it as the best time in his life because I was home for two months. And he even now says: "Mom lets be poor as long as you are home." He really loved those two months.

What happened is that HERE (Hotel Employees Restaurant Employees) found out that I was in Santa Rosa. And they had wanted to get somebody here in Santa Rosa. So they interviewed me, and they hired me to work in Santa Rosa. But it did not work out, also here in Santa Rosa. So I ended up working in Oakland, which is what I was doing until I got pregnant. I worked there for three years.

Q: Do you remember the year you had to go to work for Local 87 in San Francisco?

A: It was probably 1990-91.

Q: By then, besides having to change locals, how was the climate at Calliope Designs and PSGF? What had the workers gained? How was the working situation for them?

A: I think there still was pressure. But they were able to have a little more financial security and job security at Calliope Designs. At that time I think the [working] situation had improved for them. They were able to have their benefits and job security, even though there was no contract at
Calliope Designs for some reason. I feel it was based on the strength of the workers. The owner viewed them as though there was a contract. In other words, he would not violate things, he would not fire them. So he was respectful of the union. In a forceful way, he got forced to be respectful. In other words he did not try to violate too many things. He was really good about that situation.

Q: When did he start moving his plant down to Tijuana, Mexico?

A: When the free Treaty [North American Free Trade Agreement -NAFTA] was passed. It was around then. There was a rumor among the Calliope Designs workers that they were training people in Mexico to start a plant over there. And they did open a plant over there and kept this one open for awhile. But then after a while, they finally just closed completely here and opened up the other one.

Q: Do you remember the year and month?

A: I think it had to be 1992. All the workers at Calliope Designs were still there with the exception of Paulina who, after she won her National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) case and got reinstated, went back and worked there for one day or so. Mostly just as symbolic, she returned and worked for one day and stood up in front of everyone and made some union statements and just left the job.

Q: How about Roberto Garcia?

A: I think Roberto might have left too. That is right, Roberto had gone and worked some place else. I think later Rafael Lopez did too.

Q: Then by 1992, workers started leaving Calliope Designs?

A: Most of the couples that were there, one would leave. Because once the rumor started that CD was going to probably close, the couples decided that at least one of them should start seeking outside work to get security for their family.

Q: That was happening to Calliope Designs workers. What was happening to PSGF workers at the same time?
A: I think at that time things were going pretty well, except there were some people who, I remember, had been fired after the contract was signed (Whom?) This was Candelaria Garcia. [She] was one person I remember because I went and did a grievance for her. She got caught I think selling stuff, selling inside, and had been already warned. She had been warned already two or three times no to do it any more, and she continued. We were not able to get her job back. At that time things were kind of slow. Nothing unique was happening. People were settling down to just working under a contract.

Q: After you did all the organizing? was there a network among Mexican and White workers in terms of helping Mexican workers find better-paying jobs?

A: One thing that we did, I think it was good in our affiliation but most important I think just being SCIU and being so out there in the force front of the labor movement in Sonoma County was that allowed our members to be able to feel competent in themselves --to start gaining confidence.

Newman and I would talk to other unions to find out if there were other jobs openings that would advance our workers out of the kind of work they were doing. So we talked to the carpenters. We talked to them about their apprenticeship program. A few of our members went through that program --Manuel Pena-- He went through that until he got hurt on his job, and then Salvador Bejar. There was also a Salvadoreno guy, but I do not remember his name. Well, he did not go through the apprenticeship program, he went through something else.

Q: Was there a movement in leaving mostly by men seeking better jobs in both plants?

A: It is interesting, I think, the experience that I saw in SCIU. What it did first of all in Sonoma County it sort of shocked the labor movement. It shocked them and woke them up. I think, in general the labor movement became aware that there was this incredible group of workers, Mexican workers, who were capable of being organized, capable of fighting, and were actually very militant and determined to better their working conditions. So other unions sort of woke up to this particular group of workers. Then even politically we also had an impact on not
only the workers themselves. They started to become more active in organizations, for example, the Interfaith Organizing Project targets more people working in the community, politically. And so some of our members became members of that group and advanced themselves politically.

Q: How about their impact in the peace community?

A: I think in other organizations started to also see that there was an invisible group of people and, all of sudden, people became aware of all these Mexican workers and that they are capable of being involved politically in the community. And we ended up helping other groups and union with leafleting. We ended up helping them with picket lines because we became very good at picket line duty. So people knew that we knew how to handle a picket line. So other unions started asking us for solidarity help and also even hiring some of our picketers.

Q: Now, if you look back, and see what impact this union had in the Mexican community, how do you see the impact among themselves?

A: I think that is the other point I was going to make. First I thought we had an impact on the labor movement, and then in general other communities, like the peace. Even the African-American people, because some of them came to our picket lines. But I think the most important thing that came out of SCIU was that, all of a sudden a group of workers and predominantly women who were never been involved [before] in their lives, who had not even gone to probably to any meetings at all, who had no knowledge of being politically active, became politically active. And the only reason is that you have to start at the work site, because that is the place they are most of the time, other than in their homes. We ended up organizing them at their point were they are most active, day in and day out. And all of a sudden this group of women became active in the schools, with their children. they became active in the community. Many of them went into trying to get better jobs, went into going to school trying to learn English. To me a lot of them learned skills that they did not think they even had, talents that they had. Like public speaking, being able to use computers and copiers for that matter. We had workers who did not even know, I remember when we did a mailing, sent letters out, some workers even did not know where
the stamp went on the envelopes. This is how incredible it was. I remember having to show them how to collate, how to do a mailing, how to pass out a leaflet, how to get people to sign a petition. All these things, I think were skills that were learned during the struggle. Even though I think that SCIU no longer exists, we changed the lives of many people. Not only the workers themselves, their lives were changed. A lot of the women [too] —It was very different for them after words, in their family. They were different. They were changed. Their children looked at those women differently. They looked at their mothers differently not just as someone who cooked for them. They viewed their mother as being on the picket lines. Now they were women who were more confident. Because of that, I think it had an effect on their children. In the Mexican community they also got recognized. Even though it was so hard, and I know that they would look back and realize that it was very difficult. And one of the things is that women themselves became known, the women and the men of SCIU. SCIU became a political entity that the community as a whole had to deal with, and they themselves viewed themselves as that. They started realizing that, "I have power. I am able to have some influence on some things." Because of that, as I said, too many of them looked back and said that it was a hard time. It was a horrible time. Many of them would think it was just so difficult, and it was. It was so difficult at their work site. They had to deal with their bosses who were so angry at the fact that they finally got united and wanted to have a voice. They had to deal with who? with their husbands. Some of them were opposed. And even some men had to deal with their wives because it was a new thing. You had to be at meetings, you had to be active. It was hard that all these activities were going on on weekends, instead of being with the children. Now you were either at a picket line or some place else, or having to go to a meeting, or whatever. It was a very difficult time. But I think, at the end, I always tell workers that even though we may have lost the overall battle; *Que la lucha ya esta ganada.* (The struggle is already won). Because in each of them they were changed, they became different. They could never go back. I remember one time, Javier Arreguin told me, he said --Javier Arreguin was the Calliope Design worker who had been on strike. He was the one who was angry at us for not wanting to go on strike and afterwards he said. "Alicia, beat me up if I want to go on strike again." But one of the things I remember he said to me. "I will never be able to pass a picket line again without stopping and going and taking some
refreshments to those workers because now I know what it is like to be on a picket line, on a strike." I also remember Elena Pulido, who was a woman, who was in Calliope Designs, the oldest worker in Calliope Designs, an older woman and who we ended making her the treasurer for Calliope Designs workers. At first she collected the dues and kept track of them. You know she was a woman who never in her life thought that she could do that, and she became the treasurer for Calliope Designs workers. And then, you had somebody like Sara Ochoa, who was a woman who I felt was already a leader but just came out incredible and shining --being able to go out and speak in public and do interviews. I remember clearly in a meeting I made a mistake about a boycott, something regarding the boycott, and she corrected me [afterwards] and after words she apologized to me for correcting me. I said I felt complimented that I had taught someone so much about the law that now she was correcting me. So that was really good. And then there was Celia Mendoza who was very shy, and yet she was the oldest that had been working for PSGF, and she finished the struggle.

Many of these women three years later were still active. They brought their children to the picket lines. They were up in the mornings, did leaflets helping us out. The courage of these women and men to confront their boss! I have found in all my years of organizing that the hardest bond you can break is that of the boss and the worker. Even if the boss is abusive to that worker, that worker is still loyal to that boss. And yet, when that worker stands up and says "No more! I am not going to take this kind of abuse. I am not going to take any more being disrespected and treated like an animal," it takes so much courage. It is an extremely high level of courage. And that is something that I admire about all the workers, men and women.

Paulina Martinez went on back to school and started to learn English. Fina had already some knowledge of English. I remember Fina was doing the phone banking at the beginning. She would call people and remind them about our lunches or meetings. She was the one that would call the community. They were all these people who, even though they were really quiet and shy, they ended up doing things that they never thought they were capable of doing.
I think the reason we had a victory in both PSGF and Calliope Designs and, in general, why SCIU became such a powerful force in Sonoma County was because of the unity of the workers and their courage and their determination to finish the struggle. One of the things we said at the beginning of the struggle was that we had to finish it.
Newman Strawbridge, union organizer,
Sonoma County Industrial Union

Q: How did you come in contact with the Calliope Designs workers?

A: We formed something called the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC), which was designed to network—at that time I believe it was called the Labor Law Enforcement Network (LLEN), at that time it was network because I remember very clearly Alicia and I talking about that there was no center, no organization. The idea was to network—actually, it came from some work we'd done in Ventura County, organizing some citrus shed workers, and also my experience at the Labor Commissioners office, where it was very, very clear that (during) the several years prior to this that labor conditions were being forced downward. Reaganomic productivity questions had really taken the kind of racist labor relations in California and pushed Latino workers below the minimum standards. That was very clear from the Labor Commissioners office in Ventura. We developed this leaflet that just basically asked, were you paid overtime, were you paid minimum wage, have you been treated differently because of your race and sex, things like that where you—that we just started using up here.

Q: Who is we, another network?

A: Originally on the leaflet in this county, I was just passing it out.

Q: In Ventura County?

A: No, here.
Q: Because according to Alicia Sanchez, you came to a group of friends and organized a network, and you developed the flyer and you were passing it to different places here.

A: Yeah, the actual flyer came to this county from Ventura County. I wrote the flyer and we were using it down there in connection with the citrus workers, because we passed it also around Latino communities trying to develop support among other workers. Now, the way the organized body got involved was that we proposed to make an analysis of how to sustain work among the working class in this county, but particularly among the most exploited of the working class, which anywhere in California until recently is almost exclusively Latino workers. What we did is, what I remember, and I'm not sure how long this took, several people from this group came together and started meeting in mornings and evenings making a study of where people worked. We literally broke down all the different work sectors, on the proposition that this might be something that we would do as a group over a sustained period of time.

Q: Were you passing this out only to Latino workers, or to every worker that you came in contact with?

A: The leaflet was bilingual as I remember, and a version of that leaflet goes out now, at the fair and at pickup centers, places like that. We just this year put out about 4,000 leaflets. After the dance, there were five on the ground. That was the phenomena then, too, workers are still forced way below what legal standards are. So anyway, this group of people were together and came from different parts of the political community, began to
meet and study the conditions of the exploited folks in the county. The employment relations here--of course, we came from out of county--are just like everywhere else in California. What you have is, you've got a base production point, a base commodity point in agriculture that's fueled by Latino labor that spills over and creates a service industry town. That's what we found here, and as it is everywhere else in California that I've worked, it is extremely productive and extremely profitable, the profit rate and productivity rates are enormously high because of the racist teeth to the employment relationships. It's like being in the South in the early sixties. The conditions basically were this: you had an economy based on racism, you had labor laws that were created in the crescendo of the labor movement in 1934 and 1937 and never taken off the books. You had conditions that were in Reagan and the Right wing Democrats' drive to "be competitive", you had a fast decrease in labor conditions, so you had a strange place in history where the labor movement was actually behind or more retarded that the labor laws. The kind of Winnebago worker, the white worker, was beginning to get a little bit afraid, and I think that's one of the bases that this group got a labor coalition, as white workers for a few years had become less insulated from the conditions of the Latino workers.

(The leaflet) was originally passed out bilingually, and the reason I digress is then as now, white workers were simply not interested in it. Now when we pass that leaflet out, the group that does it now, they just get mad at us. Then, I don't remember, but now it amazes me, I get workers that say why are you telling me this information, and I'll be telling them about their overtime rights.
Q: Paul Kaplan and Alicia Sanchez were telling me that it's true that you were passing it in different sectors in Sonoma, but that they were going to Latinos and all kinds of people, and that everybody was calling you, whites and Latinos.

A: That's true.

Q: So at this point you were the leader, you had the knowledge of the labor laws.

A: What happened is we decided to meet as a group, a lot of times and decide whether there was a real basis, a material basis for this work, and we met for several months and decided that there was. Then, what we started doing was to pass the leaflets out, and we passed them out in working class centers, like K-Mart, I remember that because I would get calls from the K-Mart managers. We set up a phone, a PO Box, and the members in this group that wanted to focus on this started meeting and learning how to explain labor laws to people. These are minimum standard laws, which as I said passed at the crescendo of the thirties movement, and they set up the floor basis for labor standards. The reason for using them is one, they were the laws that were being violated, and two, you can get victories with them, they're pretty black letter law, and you can get victories, which is really important with organizing. We started getting calls back, and what I remember is that the calls crossed race lines, I still remember them as being predominately Latino, I remember we started keeping records on them, and different people in the group would call people back, explain to them how they could go about getting their rights, and we had two levels for it, one was just to get the person--cause if you think about it, the person who is having their minimum
standards violated is very vulnerable economically, they’re people that really need the money right then. So we had a service level to it, as I remember we did get money back to people. The idea was to develop some form of a working class organization. Clearly, at that point we had not made a decision to form an independent union. As I remember it, there was no real decision to form a union at that point. It was to set up a network of people that were kind of a pre-union formation, that would funnel themselves, if I remember our thought at the time, more into either the unions that existed or into the merger of the civil rights-type question with the labor question.

Q: It was my understanding that you had gone and requested from the existing unions to see if they would be willing to organize the unorganized, and they were either very busy maintaining their membership or they didn't show any interest at that time, because they didn't have the resources.

A: I don't think that's the reason, the factual thing is that I went, I'm not sure if Alicia did or not, but I went to the Central Labor Council, and each individual union that I could meet with, and they were nice, (but) they were not interested in organizing this group. The Machinists, one guy with the Machinists was very open to it, and John Hadzess with the Carpenters was open to there being a need, but they were very, very reticent about who would be organizing this effort. Their basic material relationship to it was that the incredible demise in the floor, the base conditions for the poorest workers, was beginning to have a drag on their bargaining. They were having to then bargain about lowering their collective bargaining agreements
because employers now had busted the bottom. I remember very clearly talking about that they saw this as a problem, and they would love to have a LLEC, a network available here to keep employers from being able to go very far below collective bargaining standards. My impression as to the reason they were not as a group interested in organizing the workers that would be involved into their union is that it would change the demographics of their union.

Q: How so?

A: Well, it would bring in a lot of more militant and Latino (workers), that not necessarily being the same thing, but the poor worker tends to want real representation right then, and to have problems that Unions have to deal with. I don't believe these elected leaders, who had been elected for many many years inside their own union wanted a whole group of new people coming in that they didn't know how they were going to vote.

So what happens, and the reason union bureaucracies don't really push organizing is, you have to remember, no matter how undemocratic, at some level or not they are elected, and so they get a stable work force below them, they don't want to bring in another, let's say, tenth of their local voting force, they might get voted out of office. I raised that with several people including Hadzess, and he just kind of smiled and indicated that he also believed that--well, several people believed--that there would be no place for massive--that is right, one of our agendas was a massive multi-union organizing drive.

Q: Your Network agenda, or your group?
A: Well, at this point in history I don't really remember when things became a group agenda or when they--I am positive, I mean it was an incredibly honest group, that they would have had that agenda. I don't remember it-- yeah, I do, too, because I remember breakfast meetings, I remember Paul--President of the Service Employees International Union here--was talking about if we found service workers, people in the service industry, how hard it would be but that they would try to bring them in and create an organizing base inside (SEIU Local) 707. That makes me think that we must have been talking about funneling people into already-established unions, and getting unions involved in organizing the unorganized. Over the long run, we basically found that they're not interested in that. But they were very, very energized by the organizing drive that did take place.

Q: From these breakfast meetings or evening meetings, you were talking about in this county you found out there was a need, a basis for a union, mostly for Latino workers. How did you come to that conclusion?

A: The data simply confirmed what we knew when we started. I mean, I'd just spent seven years of strikes inside the Latino community in various counties. So, what you found here is the percent, the number of actual labor hours of unorganized workers in the county is very large, there's a large number of Latino unorganized hours. If you add to that the factor of the lowest paid wages, then you get--what was happening here, and part of Reaganism was to decentralize production to units that traditional unions were not interested in, and of course in California your low minimum wage
work is distributed to the isolated or more vulnerable Latino community and has been for years. So, what we found is that agriculture, which is the biggest producer in the county, is predominately Latino, and in what we call the sweatshop industry, the small twenty to thirty to forty person unit of light manufacturing, very small amount of fixed capital, that was all Latino and Asian, but mostly Latino. So that's what the study found, but that confirmed what anybody that works in California knows. It's just that we actually did it for this county and spent some time using that also as a technique to convince the group members that this was something that should be done and could be done as a basis for expressing their own political ideals and political desires, too.

Q You were receiving the phone calls, receiving some flyers back, and you were really doing a study, writing everything down, keeping numbers? You and I know that there was the need, but if somebody who does research would come and ask you how did you come up with this.

A: Well, it didn't really come from the responses, it came from our studying each industry. We divided up the industries at the evening and breakfast meetings, and then we did studies of each industry. Number of workers, number of women, number of contacts, what unions were involved. We broke down the work in Sonoma County, and we each studied an industry. We studied different industries to determine who is in what industry, what unions were involved. Cause we also had planned to make contact with unions, so if we--you know, machine shops, small production. So we studied all that. Finally, I think we came to the point where yes, what we think exists-- and in terms of the data that
was coming from the leaflets, that was really more of a service data—in other words, we had to keep up with what we were doing and actually do what we said we'd do on the leaflet, or our ultimate organizing would not work. We'd get a bad reputation. So we did do real detailed follow-through on the leaflet calls, and the people from the group actually trained themselves in strange laws, and responded, and spent hours doing it.

**Q** Two things happening with this group, the industry studies, and the leaflet.

**A:** No, that's not what I'm trying to say, the two were the same thing. We didn't have an idea that there was—we didn't come to the fact that there needed to be a strictly Latino organizing drive from the group. That really emerged from the relationship of who came forward to be organized, and what unions were open to those people being organized into them. Racism ultimately defined the independent character of this union drive. It was not an agenda item, in fact it was discussed that most people in this group I believe subscribed to the idea that what in history is called dual unions are bad. There's some debate on that, I mean I don't think that, ... 

**Q** What do you mean by dual unions?

**A:** Dual unions basically emerged in the thirties, and the history of the union in this county is considered a dual union, that is a union organized by the left with a much more rank and file power base organized with a much more political rather than a narrow economic agenda.

**Q** Where you will have more minorities?
A: Right, they started these a whole lot when they carried women into manufacturing. Basically, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party of the thirties, the teens and the thirties, began—they would be thrown out of the AFL, and so they would organize unions, and they were considered dual unions. They were some of the most effective unions in the country. That's where Foster and that group came in, that whole "bore from within" is a rejection of dual unionism. Now, a lot of good left people are making $80,000 as union bureaucrats, "boring from within". So anyway, the data from the leaflets was not just service, because what we were looking for, and I remember really clearly talking with the workers that would come forward with a labor problem, and seeing if they were interested in an organization, a meeting with other workers, or whether they just wanted specifically to handle their overtime problem. That's how Calliope came about, basically Calliope workers had a rest break problem, and a lunch break, but mostly I believe a rest break problem. It was a wage and hour problem, and they went to CRLA.

Q: You were talking about getting a reputation when you were passing the leaflet out. Reputation among workers, and also community members, like lefties, people who were concerned?

A: Yes, we came here—we had an experience in Ventura County where it appeared that—I have to back up here. For a long long time, Alicia and I were involved very specifically in the farm worker community, and as we got out of the UFW-type community, which is really very isolating in a way, we began working with shed workers, and what we found in the Oxnard-Ventura area was that progressive members of the community had really
been discriminated against by, in a sense, the Farmworkers Union, and they were really really wanting to associate themselves with a labor organizing drive. It was a desire to have their politics really productive, feel useful, a wonderful, beautiful feeling from within, not to be disregarded because they were humanists, because they were “already left”, or “already progressive”. That happened here, I don’t know when it became an agenda, but we definitely from the beginning saw the power and the idea of a labor-community coalition. I would like to talk about what forces came together here to allow this thing to happen, but one of them definitely is that this community, Sonoma County, has a large number of left-of-center to left people who have various agendas, but there’s nothing around which there is a lot of common work. The left for so long has been discriminated against by trade union organizing because of the kind of sellout-- it’s very hard for a union bureaucracy to sell itself out the way it wants to if it’s got a lot of organized idealists relating to it. So that’s why unions have always pushed off leftists, because the leftists constitute a check on the union ultimately selling the workers out. When I went with SEIU after this for the short time I was with them, I was literally asked--none of my units gave up any money in the city, because we did leaflets about city manager (inaud. word) salaries--everybody above me in SEIU put a jacket--they basically wanted you to negotiate a contract that was below minimum standards.

Q: So that you could have the dues paid?

A: Yeah, ‘all we want is a checkoff and a contract’. A first contract, doesn’t matter if the contract goes below state law.
Q: Well, the first contract always has to be the best, otherwise you are setting the standards too low.

A: Well, not in the history of labor relations since the passage of the NLRA. There's a lot of the community people here....

Q: Paul (Kaplan) and Alicia (Sanchez) have mentioned the fact that the community got involved, and the fact that there was a need to form a coalition, but none of them really discussed the fact that unions had pushed, for whatever reason, the community left to the side. And now you are saying that the community wanted to participate, in whatever way they could, not everybody, but that there were people...

A: I think if you interview some of the people who did (participate), I think they will say that that's some of the nicest experiences of their (inaudible). And I think it comes from the honesty of the left and the history of being isolated--if you think about it, all right, those of us--people don't have a common thing to organize around. If you think about what is common among us, and it's work, but we've been pushed out of labor organizing, or class organizing, by class collaborationists. I think that's why there's such a deep chord of reaction once people start including themselves, because what they see is, this is something we can all get together around. Also, it is something that in its essence the remedy is not paternalistic. The remedy for organizing minimum standards workers is not a welfare check, it's a higher wage. That family takes that higher wage and spends it like they want to spend it. They get dignity with it. That's something the left is interested in. So it's
not that little step in the road, that kind of half-stepping remedies that liberal democrats say is the answer to poverty, which the left can never quite get behind. They can get behind taking a worker from a $4.25 an hour worker to an $8.00 an hour worker. So one of the factors, one of the streamlets that allowed this to take place ultimately was that Sonoma County--and it was one of the things we studied in this group, I remember this now--was how many, what liberal organizations and progressive organizations existed. This group of people, who are much more indigenous to Sonoma County than myself, knew these people, knew them here and these, these organizations, we know we can get them involved, if we ever get something going. The other part, that's kind of jumping ahead to how it got organized, the first organized response was a group of Calliope workers went to CRLA, and they interviewed a woman there named Cristina Briano. We had talked with Cristina, I'd talked with her a whole lot about using, getting CRLA more involved in labor questions with the Labor Commissioner's office, and quite frankly, ran into a significant amount of resistance (from Cristina). That meant, because of what CRLA was at the time, in terms of the Latino community, that meant CRLA, because nobody else there--there was just this kind of delegation to Cristina to make the decisions about the Latino community.

Q  Which, she is a secretary, or something like that?

A:  She was a community--I forget what they call that now, it's basically a community organizer for CRLA. So, a couple (workers) called, and then I set up a group meeting, and I remember we had to call that meeting off, cause I remember worrying all
weekend. I was involved in a pesticide investigation, and a witness came up, and so I had to go see the witness, we had to call this meeting off. I remember worrying all weekend how these workers were going to respond. I'll never forget....(end of tape).
Paul Kaplan, community activist and President of Service Employees International Union
Q  How did Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU) start?

A: Yes, it was January 15, 1988. It was Martin Luther King's (MLK) birthday and a group of workers, most of them Mexican workers at Calliope Designs which was a Christmas ornament manufacturing facility in Santa Rosa walked off their jobs. and they walked out their jobs because they were sick and tired of the over-time violations of working more than they were being paid and being taken advantage of. And they wanted to do something about it, and they felt that doing something on MLK's birthday would be significant because of how they viewed MLK, as someone who stood up for what was right for all people.

So, they walked off their job, and my recollection is that they talked to someone in California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) office who referred them to Newman [Strawbridge] and Alicia [Sanchez] who were actively doing work to provide workers recourse in terms of overtime violations and labor standards violations and things like that. So to be able to pursue organizing workers, [it] is when you have people who are pissed-off--you know, at been taken advantage of their job. Like could some of them going to the next step to organize the union. [It is] greater than when you have people who think that nothing could be better, nothing could be finer.

So that is how it started. and that is how Newman and Alicia were put in touch with the workers at Calliope Designs; I think Christina Briano was working for CRLA, and she knew that over time stuff had been solicited [by the workers] so that is how she put the two [Newman and Alicia and Calliope Designs workers] of them together.

Q  According to Alicia there was a group of people who were trying to organize workers in Sonoma County. she said long before SCIU was organized, a group of progressive people in Sonoma County formed the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC), which you were part of, a questionnaire was distributed at different working
sites, to see if there was in fact the need to form a union. So Calliope Designs workers did not receive the questionnaire. They came to your group seeking help. Can you discuss how it happened?

A: I know; they did not respond direct to the LLEC. LLEC was a group that really came out the [Communist Party] CP group that was in Sonoma County. In the late 1987 and 1988 the CP group decided that we needed to focus on something where everyone could participate in affecting a significant part of the working class struggle. And the need to organize unorganized workers was seen as kind of the pivot and particularly brown workers, Latino workers, because of the composition of Sonoma county being at the bottom of the rung; the organization of those workers represented a strategic work in terms of the ability of the entire class to unify them. So the idea of a vehicle to get in touch with unorganized workers, measuring their interest in terms of organizing, and what prospects there were was something that came out of the work of the CP. So LLEC was kind of the flying paper so to speak, to attract [the] unorganized--you know, pissed-off workers interested in making some kind of change or affecting their employment situation.

Q I have two questions: First: According to Alicia, it was Newman who was the main organizer of LLEC and all its works--she was not specific in who was responding to the phone calls--Did you train the people in your group to call the workers back?

A: Newman did most of the work. You have to remember that most of us were working full time jobs. Alicia was working for California Human Development Corporation (CHDC) at that time. I was working at the county schools. Newman was not working, so he had more time than anyone else. and, what he did was that he trained some other people who worked part time or had more of an interest to provide them with some basic information and some basic skills to follow up some of the stuff as well. But, the bulk of the follow up was done was done by Newman. One, because he had the time, and, two, because he had the experience. His experience in terms of enforcing labor laws goes way back in terms of all
forms. So that's who responded. And--you know--there was a number of important things that were pursued which won people back pay, stuff like that. It was mostly back pay.

Q: Do you remember if people obtained some over-time, etc. pay from their employers by receiving assistance from LLEC?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: And some to her things?

A: There were some discriminatory things, I am not sure on how those resulted. Most of the issues had to do with discrimination at work, mainly sexual discrimination at work, and overtime violations in terms of workers getting stiffed from working more than eight hours a day and not getting time and a half. So those were the two main areas that I recall, that [they] were the areas of complaints, and there were a variety of different kinds of places.

Q: you were doing this kind of work at least six months before the Calliope Designs workers came to your group seeking assistance?

A: It was enough time to gain a reputation amongst people in the community, that [these were] the people who were dealing with these kinds of issues. And it was pretty clear amongst the progressive activists [about] the reason why this activity was going on--why people were seeking information in terms of labor law violations. Was to look for labor organizing facilities.

Q: this reputation you gained, was mostly among progressive people in the community and not the workers.

A: No, no, in terms of who--the information was distributed at different work sites and in different neighborhoods, but people would be asked to help distribute the stuff, not just in terms of party people, but other progressives in the community. It was known within the larger progressive community what was going on, and people were asked to help in terms of variety [of] things.
Q: After the questionnaire was distributed, people called you and you helped. Do you remember how many people were helped?

A: Newman will have a better recollection of how many cases produced a back-pay settlement and how many cases did not--what the ratio was. Like I said, he was more on top of it that anyone else.

Q: To your recollection, the workers at Calliope Designs chose MLK Day to walk off their jobs. According to Alicia it was a mere coincidence.

A: Yes, January 15, 1988, which was his real birthday, and not the holiday.

Q: Can you discuss, to your best recollection how the workers came to your group, and how some or all of you, helped to form a union? And, if you remember more in specific detail what was happening during the strike because that is a very important component of their struggle.

A: They walked off their jobs. Then they went to CRLA. They were referred to Alicia and Newman. Newman and Alicia met with them. And they talked about all the options of what they could do in terms of filing a claim for overtime violations to meet the immediate abuses. Or, they could organize a union to go for the long howl and [to] fix the situation in a long-standing way. The workers unanimously opted to go for the long howl, organize a union, and win justice for once in the workplace. And the specific day of that I do not know. But, I think the woman who made the motion was Angelica--Fina's [Adolfina Hernandez] sister. And it was the way Alicia described it. I was not at that meeting. Alicia and Newman said a very emotional kind of thing in terms of moving with the fist, that is, how you make a decision to do something, so you have to move. So she raised her fist to move that they form a union and everyone voted at that time. And, that is how the union was born.

Then there is a process that you go through in terms of filing for election for representation, which was initiated. The union was formed. It was decided to be independent. The name was
Sonoma county Industrial Union (SCIU), and the reason why it was to be independent was because the workers essentially mistrusted other unions that they saw, either [having had] themselves or their family members being a part of it--namely the Teamsters union, the local in Sonoma County. The other place were people worked, either had worked or worked part time that was organized by a union was the canneries. and the conditions of work were really bad, the level of justice at the job was non-existent and people really questioned the value of that kind of union. And, they saw affiliating to a union as being that. That is what they did, they did not want to have anything thing to do with it. So that is why they decided to [be] independent. They went to [through a] process of signing the petition to request the NLRB to hold a representation election which [did] happened.

Q. Alicia mentioned that Newman had previously gone to different local unions to request the organizing of the unorganized, particularly brown workers, and she said that unions did not have the resources at that time: One the workers mistrusting other unions, and two, unions not being willing to organize them. Is that how it happened?

A: I do not know how extensively Newman's searched for other unions was, but I know that in my union, for instance, people are hesitant to make broad general statements without the specifics. Unless you have something on the table, the unions are not going to talk about it. Once it started, once the people started the representation campaign and once they won the election, I think it was in March, in the middle of March. Once the vote came in and was successful, then all the other unions that had paid lip service in being interested in organizing the unorganized workers, but had problems with resources. [Unions] came around to help, to sniff, to see what they could do, all that kind of stuff. We had the carpenters, and the retail clerks, and people from my union, which is SEIU and different unions from the labor council, and [there] were [the] hotel and restaurants, workers that wanted to see what was going on. Organizing brown workers with an independent structure was kind of the idle opening thing, and it happened so quickly and so successfully in terms of the vote, and with no
resources. What was the money spent with this? No money, and these people were not used to seeing anything succeed in this kind of way and they were very interesting in looking around.

But in the beginning, no. It was not that people were against it, but people did not know how to do it. When you got people within the structure of the labor movement who had never participated in the organizing effort, they would say politically that they agreed with organizing workers, but because their experience level was so low they did not have the foggiest ideas of ways to go about it. So that was the situation. It was not like people were against it, but people did not know how to do it. This really showed people that it can be done and provided some avenues for people to do it. Now in terms of the vote, I remember...

Q Before you move into the elections, can you discuss the election campaign your group organized to have a successful election, and what campaign the employer organize to defeat the election?

A: I do not remember about the employer. I remember going out and visiting workers at their homes, talking to them about voting for the union.

Q How about the rally-lunches the union organized?

A: I think we started having every Friday afternoon rallies, lunch rallies, with community support to show the company that white people supported these workers and to show these workers that support went beyond just people at work, and they were very successful in engaging other union activists, other community groups peace groups, the political groups to come together to rally to support around this organizing drive and the election. So it helped focus the work of lots of people in terms of concentrating them on the success of this organizing effort. I guess it must have started in February.

Q the home visits, who would conduct them, who would talk to the workers, what was discussed?
A: I went to one woman's house with Newman, and she was a baker and kind of ambivalent. I think that she ended up voting against the union. She worked on a different shift than everyone else. She did not work in terms of immediate production, but she baked the dough for people to use. So she was not that tight into everyone else in terms of their jobs. She did not work directly with them; she worked different hours and stuff. So she was very susceptible to the employer's line about what the union was going to do, what the union was for. It was not all the brown workers who worked at the plant. There were white workers too, who worked in different aspects. and I think that the vote came down along the racial lines. the majority, the way that the union was won is that the majority of the people who worked there were Latino workers, and so that is how the union was successful. In terms of bridging that gap, the employers were very successful in using people's racial identity to divide them up.

Q: There were brown and white workers working side by side?

A: White workers did the painting, shipping, boxing and things like that. I do not think that the clerical people were part of the unit the way it was determined. So the people who worked in the office were not included in the vote. But there was a minority of white workers who did jobs other than making the ornaments. Brown workers were the production people. They were the people who took the dough, who made the ornaments according to the specifications and who did all the final detail. These were intricate pieces of work. It was not like [they] were slapped together from the machines. They were all doing it by hand.

Q: do you remember if there were any differences in terms of wages between white and brown workers?

A: I do not have the specific recollection, my feelings is that there was a piece rate--the production workers, were paid a piece rate. In other words, depending on how fast you were determined in how you much made an hour. Whereas the white workers who worked in none-production, in production but not in an assembly-type of stuff, were paid an hourly rate. So it did not matter how fast or hard they worked for the same rate. People who were
really good, at what they did, were able to work very quickly and do very good work and get a high rate because of how they worked. But there were a whole different rates of pay. Those were all the specifics which got into the overtime stuff, those which initiated the thing. But specifically, what people made, you should ask some of the workers.

Q: I will. Going back to the campaign, can you describe it more in detail?

A: Wearing buttons at work was important for people to identify at work as union supported because it is against the law for the employer to treat people who support the union any differently that anyone else. So the key thing in terms of making those kinds of charges is that the employer did not know that so was a supporter. So to protect the workers and their rights to organize, which is federal protective right, it was important for people to be identified as supporting the union. And the easiest way to do that was to wear a button.

Q: You were also holding regular meetings with the workers.

A: What do you mean? In terms of the CP group?

Q: Well, yes?

A: No, not at all. The people in the CP group were involved directly with the workers. Everyone in the CP group helped build the support around the lunches and the support of all the activities because people in the CP group were involved in any other areas of struggle. And what the CP was doing at that time was focusing all of its energy on the question of organizing these workers. So every time that the CP members were involved in, was oriented towards this. And there were all these different avenues for people to channel their political work in this direction and to convince people of the importance of organizing the unorganized workers in relation to either the struggle around the world, in Central America, or in terms of peace, in terms of labor groups, or in terms of electoral stuff. All tied together in terms of this.
Q: During the campaign for election, it was mostly Newman and Alicia who were meeting with the workers?

A: They were the organizers of the union. Alicia was working full time for another employer, so her life was really kind of nuts. Newman at this time was still pursuing the other labor law enforcement stuff as well. But much of their time and everyone else was working during the day. There were lots of meetings during the night and on the weekends. Now in the course of this campaign, after the election was successful in the middle of March, some workers from Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF) approached the union to become involved in it because of the situations that they were experiencing at work. My understanding is that a number of women at Calliope Designs [who had] their relatives, sisters, etc., working at PSGF viewed the developments at Calliope Designs so positive that they asked why that kind of change could not be done over there. So they approach Alicia and Newman about working with them to organize the workers there. On the heels of the relatively quick successful election at Calliope Designs, there was prospect for another organizing campaign which was significantly larger and much more complex and nutty in terms of all of the stuff that had gone at the fishery just across town. There were hundreds of workers who worked in that facility as opposed to the 20 to 25 that worked at the other place. Just the volume in terms of reaching everyone and all that kind of stuff was a much more complex situation. But that was happening about the same time as the election.

Q: The organizing at PSGF was happening at the same time the elections or the strike was happening at Calliope Designs?

A: the strike was after the vote at PSGF I am pretty sure. and the way that I remember is that the prospect of a rally launching something at PSGF happened after the election victory at Calliope Designs. People went from Calliope Designs to PSGF so quickly that the Calliope Designs workers starting to feel neglected. They won representation, and they needed to bargain for a contract with the employer and that became problematic because, in terms of skilled contract negotiators, there was not lots of experience. It was experience in terms of organizing workers that Alicia and
Newman had and brought to bear more than it was in terms of actually sitting down and bargaining for a contract and it got into a lot of adversary stuff, and things--the first contract is always the hardest. And things began to break down very quickly. At the same time, there was a lot of need for attention at PSGF because that organizing effort was getting under way and that was such a massive project as compared to the Calliope Designs. and, as I recall, things started to heat up in April or May [1988], and there was an election at PSGF, I am not sure when it was, but it was before the strike at Calliope Designs and everyone participated in doing all the stuff in terms of the election at PSGF. That was seen as like: "If we do not win this, it would be a set back for everything." It was a do-or-die kind of thing.

Q: If you did not win PSGF election, or the Calliope Designs contract?

A: The representation at PSGF.

Q: Going back to Calliope Designs, could you discuss how negotiations went?

A: Things broke down; they became very adversarial. The company hired a lawyer to do the negotiating, and Newman and Alicia did it on behalf of the workers, and they had a group of workers--Negotiating the first contract is always the hardest. Of course now I have a lot more experience with negotiating and contract stuff than I did then. It probably would have been wise at that time to engage a third party to negotiate for the workers.

Q: What kind of third party?

A: Well, like someone who worked for the union who would do the negotiating. Negotiating is a process were you need to be somewhat removed from it in order to be effective. If you are totally involved in it, you are affected by it. It works better when you are not intimately involved in it and that is not to say that there should not be people who are intimately involved in it. But the person who leads it, needs to have somewhat the ability to detach. and looking back on it, that was definitely not something
that was brought to the process and the result was that things got very adversarial very quickly and very entrenched in terms of divergent positions. It just deteriorated in terms of the ability to talk, to talk through things, to utilize the process of collective bargaining.

Q: Do you think the problems they had with the contract was because, one, Alicia and Newman were too involved, and two, they did not have the sufficient experience in dealing with contracts as sophisticated as piece rate?

A: The employer did not want to give anything in the contract that he already was not giving in independent terms of agreement. There was not a willingness on the employer's part. There was a variety of things that were at play. The inexperience in our part for one, the newness in organizing industrial workers, Latino type, in Sonoma County so that where can you refer [for help]. The complexity in terms of piece-rate structure, how the work was organized, and negotiating a labor agreement which will codify that and put it all writing [was a lot]. And really the vehemence that the employer had to have fought this way, the help that this employer received from other employers who had relatively small groups of workers doing this kind of light industrial type of work. There was a variety of things at play which contributed to stalling and breaking down the collective bargaining process for the contract negotiations at Calliope Designs. At the same time Vs. Vs. the union and what was happening elsewhere was the development at PSGF which was seen as a tremendous opportunity to gain a foothold in the community and the reputation amongst the Latino workers throughout the county because everyone, either knew someone who worked at PSGF or worked there at one time, or was going to work there. Among brown workers, the reputation was only to be equal for the canneries. In terms of ongoing kind of work that brown workers, Latino workers had access to in Sonoma County, that was one of the few places because cannery work was seasonal and field work was seasonal. It was a real important step for the union to take, and everyone saw that, and people put their attention into making that happen. It resulted in being a successful campaign. The workers there were a good solid group. Workers brought experience in terms of unions from México.
Q. Let's go back to the negotiations at Calliope Designs. According to Alicia, she said one of the reasons it was difficult to have agreements with the employer was because. On one hand, he had a small group of workers, and he saw them as his "family." She said that he had more personal hurt than business hurt. Do you think that was true? Did you see that?

A: I think that was true. There were a number of key things that were brought into play. If he had been a cooperative employer and had not raise a fuss about negotiating a contract, probably our inexperience would not have contributed to getting in the way. But not doing that, being a real butt about it and not being around the block about it and hiring a lawyer to do the work contributed to the kind of climate that existed there at the table. Things broke down very quickly, from my understanding. Now I did not participate in any of the talks at the table, but I was very informed.

Q. Your group was doing two things: PSGF election campaign, and Calliope Designs contract negotiations. [It was] all volunteer work, no one was being paid?

A: No one was being paid, I think Alicia was working for CHDC. In fact, I think [that] before the elections at PSGF, George Ortiz--CHDC President--granted Alicia two weeks off work to do the election work.

Q. You mentioned that the PSGF election campaign was very successful because the workers had experience in union organizing. Alicia mentioned that the workers had no experience in terms of union organizing! Which is true?

A: Experience in terms of this country?

Q: No, union organizing in terms of their country.

A: The Calliope Designs workers did not have lots of experience. They had been here longer than a number of the workers at PSGF. A number of workers at PSGF had not been in this country that long, as long as the workers at Calliope Designs.
Q Let’s discuss the PSGF election campaign. What were the strategic points you used to have this election being successful?

A: Well, we tried to get in touch with every worker. I remember we were having really big meetings on the weekends. Hundreds of people would come and talk for a long time about what is involved, what is at stake, how to go about it. These were PSGF workers—as at the labor center. I remember going to many meetings there [and] listening to people.

We had an office there. The Carpenters Union let us have an office at the labor center. And the office was either at a reduced rate, or, [they] donated the office. We had access to the halls, when they were not being used for other things, to have our meetings for the PSGF workers. Because hundreds of workers, their families, and their kids, came to these very long meetings.

Q Were you doing house visits the same way you were doing them for Calliope Designs workers?

A: I do not remember most of it because I do not speak Spanish.

Q What other strategies were you doing besides the actions you mentioned?

A: There were different kinds of events that were organized—lunches, but they were more like picket rally kind of thing instead of a gathering. At Calliope Designs part of the parking lot was a grassy shaded area were people would hang out and eat their lunch. At PSGF there was a gate, and there was a sidewalk, and there was the street. So there was no place to hang out other than on the sidewalk. We needed to move if we were on the sidewalk.

I think I was in New York when the vote happened. The vote was in the beginning of June in 1988, and my cousin was getting married June 12. And I think the vote was the day before. I think I made arrangements to call Celia Mendoza, and she first told me that they lost. And then she laughed, and she told me that Newman told her to tell me that they lost. And then she told me that they won, and there was a huge margin. The other thing that we did in terms of the effort around the election [is that] we [were] divided into committees. The workers were divided into a variety of
committees, and different people form the CP and the community who supported this effort worked with the workers through the committee structure. It was so cumbersome to deal with things in these big meetings that it seemed that it was a more useful way to work in committees. I served on a committee with Celia and Eric Fried. We used to meet at Celia's house. The purpose of this committee was to generate some kind of support. I remember going with Susana Garcia with her baby to a meeting to a church that was interested in hearing more about what was going on. I think it was a Presbyterian church that was on the east part of town. We both spoke to this group. It was a social concerns group of the church. It was a committee to generate other support.

Q: What kind of work did PSGF workers do? Were they all brown workers?

A: There were different workers who did different things. There were the filleting [fileteras]; most of them were Mexican women. There were workers who did other things, preparing other kind of fish, like shellfish, crab. etc. Those were high-paid workers, and they were more men. They were mostly Mexicans. The way I understood how it broke down in the factory was that most of the Mexican workers did either the production kind of work, filleting, or preparing the fish. There were Portuguese workers who were the supervisors. There were not Mexican supervisors that I understand. The truck drivers were organized by the Teamsters. They were mainly white workers, white men.

Q: Were they hired by the same company or by different company?

A: [They were represented by a union. And the Teamsters were not interested in organizing the rest of the workers. Newman talked to the Teamsters, and they said 'no."

Q: did the PSGF employer have experience in dealing with union?

A: Well, the truck drivers were organized, so they had that experience in terms of dealing with the Teamsters Union. And I thought that there had been an effort to organize the rest of the
workers in the past, but it was unsuccessful. It may have been the Laborer's Union. The employer was successful defeating that drive.

Q What was the company doing during the election campaign?

A: It seemed to me that the company was diverting their fish to other facilities, which would be effectively squeezing the workers at the plant. In other words, they were saying "there is no fish today; there is no work." Which means, if you do not work, you do not get paid. They were squeezing the workers economically in retaliation for their efforts to organize a union.

Q Who voted in this election, all the workers? And what happened after the election?

A: All the workers, the production workers that were in the majority Latinos. After the company challenged the certification of the union. The way it works is that either sign cards or you sign a petition to request the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to come hold a secret election, secret ballot election, for the purposes of representation. There are a number of things that they do before that in terms of defining the bargaining unit and all that kind of stuff, and who can vote, and all those kinds of things. You hold the election, they count the ballots, and then there is a process through which both sides can challenge ballots. Or [they] can challenge certain things that were done during the election process that were against the rules and hold up the certification. What happened was that if there is no challenge to the process by either side, then the NLRB would certify. This is the legal thing. [The NLRB]would] certify that such and such union is the exclusive bargaining unit for these workers. And there are certain laws that need to be followed in relation to that. Otherwise, laws are broken. So what this company did was they challenged the election, and they held up certification of the election, even though it was such a landslide vote, for months. It was a legal maneuver to stretch out and to stretch the resource to prolong the process to harass people, to drive them out.

The Company had hired the most prestigious anti-labor law firm from the Bay Area to represent their interest in terms of defeating this effort. The law firm was called Lttler and
Mendelsen], they gained a reputation from a variety of struggles in the Bay Area as being the worst in terms of denying workers the right to organize. They were a very high-priced outfit. They were retained by this employer to do their job. They had packages they sold to employers: "You want us to drag it out for six months, for a year, for two years? You want us to go break the union?" the firm has all these different things [to offer]. Is like if you got out to Mcdonald's and you say, "oh I want the combo # 1, combo # 2." [They] give you a hamburger, french fires and a drink. That is what they had in terms of what kind of legal representation. "How long do you want us to stretch it out for?" "Or do you want to bargain with them?" Do you want to force a strike to break the union?" They had all kinds of things that they would offer as their services to employers.

The NLRB will investigate the challenge, and then they will make a ruling. That is what the local board does. If either side does not like the ruling, they can appeal to the nation board. It is kind of a version of the court system. If you do not like the local judge's ruling, you can go to appeal at [a higher] court. I recall that. Several months after the fact, the NLRB came and investigated these charges in the [form] of a hearing and interviews. Based on all the evidence, they ruled against the company charges. The company appealed to the national[NLRB]. All of these [things] ended in holding up certification for like six months.

Q: Who was working with the workers during the hearing?

A: Alicia and Newman helped, but there was a lawyer named Neil Herring who got involved in the support activity and had the experience in labor law. [He] volunteered his services to help deal with the NLRB.

Q: After they went to the hearing of the local NLRB, the company appealed to the national board, and what happened then?

A: The national board up-held the local ruling and certified the union.

Q: What was the next step the workers took?
A: There were a number of things before certification was finished. There were a number of things we organized: A Campaign for Justice. It was a daily vigil outside the plant and we used it to organize the leaflet distribution. during the summer, June, and July. [There was a] daily picket line, and daily leaflet distributions.

Q: How do you want to be identified?

A: Well, I was a member of the SEIU 707 executive board through all this, I was vice president from 89 to 91, I think, or 88 to 90, something like that, during a lot of it I was the vice president, so I was in another union, I was on the Labor Council and stuff, but I was also at the same time the Chairperson of the Communist Party in Sonoma County.

Q: And you had mentioned that the Communist Party was involved in helping organize the workers and doing peripheral work?

A: Yes, I mean the Communist Party was, in my opinion, the backbone of the effort to bring together a successful organizing effort which included the workers in these two places, the community support, and the labor support. If it wasn't for the consistent and devoted work of members of the Communist Party and the CP organization as a whole, it wouldn't have happened.

Q: What kind of work or activities did they do to be the backbone of this organizing effort?

A: Well, we had CP members who were involved in community groups who when this developed, or when we decided to focus on organizing unorganized workers, began to move the thrust of their work to support those efforts, in peace and solidarity groups, social justice groups, things like that. And we had CP members in other labor unions, too, who began to move their labor unions to support these kinds of activities. We had CP members who were directly involved in helping workers organize,
and doing all that kind of stuff, so it was really, you know, the CP, as small as it was, was strategically positioned to be able to bring together the kinds of unity that was necessary to move forward on the kind of things, and really to make the kinds of breakthroughs which happened possible. You know, I mean you could equally say that on the other side of it, that when things began to fall apart that in large part that was—the inability to stop that was also within the CP, it was at the same time where the CP group was beginning to fall apart. So, I mean I'm not going to say one or the other, but it wouldn't have happened the way that it did had not the CP played a role.

Q  Okay, we will talk more about that at the end. I need to confirm something with you, because in our last interview, we were discussing the strike of Calliope Designs, and for how long the workers were on strike, and what kind of negotiations the Committee formed by CP workers and their representatives, Newman Strawbridge ...and how they were head to head. You were mentioning that on one part was the employer, who didn't have any experience negotiating, who was a very hard person to work with, and on the other hand, probably the lack of experience from the workers and their representatives. I have been talking to workers, and some of them mention--Alicia didn't mention this, probably she forgot, so I need to go back and confirm with her, but some of the workers had mentioned to me that the reason they went back after three months of being on strike without a contract, and without hardly any accomplishments within the contract or within the strike, that they went back to work because they were pressured by the employer to go back, that if they didn't go back by a certain day, they will never be hired again and replaced with the people who were working inside already. Is that correct?
A: It is my understanding, yes, that's what I understood. But you know, you have to, in terms of what happened specifically at the table, I was not there, so information that I have in relation to what happened is all second-hand. I was not there to participate in that or witness that, but yes, that's my recollection is that they were threatened with being permanently replaced if they didn’t go back, so everyone decided to go back all in one, and the strike ended. The dates of it--it went all the way through the summer...

Q They went back in October.

A: Yes, I remember we spent a lot of time trying to get people out on the picket lines early in the mornings, and doing solidarity stuff with the strikers, and people were involved in helping get food and all that sort of stuff to them to support them during the strike.

Q It's very interesting, because the people who were not on strike but were supporters have a different view of the strike itself than the workers.

A: Oh, I'm sure.

Q When I have been asking them, those ones who were on the negotiating committee, they really can't pinpoint how the negotiations were on the table because it was very very new for them, and Alicia really didn't give me any clear answers, so I will need to go to Newman.

A: Well, you know, the other people you can talk to, try to find out the lawyer and interview the lawyer from the company side to see what perspective they will have, it will help round out the perspective. The company hired a local attorney to represent him in the collective bargaining.
Q: On the picket line, do you remember other unions supporting the workers? What unions were supporting the workers?

A: Well, most of the unions in town that had any members to speak of came to support them, and a lot of unions would bring truckloads of food and things like that, I remember the UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers) pulling up to a rally or some kind of noontime thing we had at the workplace, with just truckloads of food, you know, dried food, beans, rice, all kinds of stuff. Other unions would send money and show support in terms of coming to the picket line, and supporting the workers like that.

Q: How was the money and food channeled, do you remember?

A: I think it went directly to the strikers, is my recollection.

Q: How was it divided, you know, like equal number of workers...

A: I'm not sure, I don't know.

Q: Because some of the workers have been talking about how hard it was for them to be on strike with no money, and sometimes the distribution of food and money were not so equal. The people making those decisions didn't look at family size, who else was working in that family beside the worker, like that.

A: Well, I don't know of all that stuff, I know that when the Labor Council voted to give the strikers money, the Secretary-Treasurer at the time was going to personally--I mean, had divided up with how many people, was going to give each person that amount. I have no
reason top believe that didn’t happen in that case, but in other cases I have no idea.

Q. Some of the workers have discussed how difficult it was for them to be in the picket line because--what many of them have mentioned is that the first two weeks many people came to support, many people came to help, but after those first two weeks less and less people kept coming to the picket line until there were but a few workers, because some of the most active ones went immediately and found a job. So, that was a heartbreaking thing for the workers who were hesitant about the strike, and who were those ones who really did stay on the picket line. One thing that all of them have told me about is how community members and other union members, but not them, behaved on the picket line, in terms of insulting the scabs.

A: Well, there was a lot of name calling, I mean when Alfredo Sanchez came--he would probably be good for you to talk to about the picket line--he kind of, when he moved back up here he kind of got totally involved in the Calliope strike, and helping to kind of beef up the picket line. He added a sense of color, verbally, to the picket line, which is a polite way of saying that he used to curse a lot to the scabs and stuff. And you know, with a sense of enthusiasm, and trying to get other people to join with him in that enthusiasm about the picket line. There were a number of situations where things were kind of tense, I recall, when we would have a community lunch and there were a lot of community people with the strikers, and we’d go around the door, and what the company would do is that they would bring out their video camera, and they would video people. It kind of helped, I mean feelings were high, and it would kind of help put it over the edge, and there was a lot of name calling and a lot of bitterness expressed. There was one incident, I wasn’t there, but it resulted in Paulina getting arrested. What I heard was
that a situation had developed on the picket line with some pushing and shoving, and that she was arrested for--I don't know, I guess disorderly conduct, I don't even know what the charge was, some kind of misdemeanor. Within the labor law, there are different things which outline picket line behavior, and there are things which could be characterized as conduct, things like that, but I think it mostly has to do with throwing things, or touching, pushing, shoving, things like that.

Q: They were not so concerned about the picket line misconduct in terms of the labor laws and regulations, but concerned about it because it's not their culture to behave that way, even though there were also some Mexicans working inside the shop. Their concern was, we have never behaved this way, and this was very difficult to take. Community members were thinking they were doing the workers a favor at that time...

A: Yes, I wasn't aware of any problems like that, or any concerns like that.

Q: I don't think the workers voiced their concerns at that time. Now, some of the workers were having a hard time when the employer at Calliope Designs put the cords around the company, and they were wondering if that was legal for him to do.

A: I don't know, I would assume so, cause they rent space there, and in the back at least it includes the loading and parking stuff. The cords were in the back, and it was essentially to keep the picketers off the back door.

Q: Do you recall what happened with the case of Paulina Martinez, when the employer accused her of hitting the woman security in her head with her picket sign?
A: Oh yes, that's right, they hired the security guards, they were a husband and wife team. I don't recall what happened. I'm not aware that there was any trial or anything, so I would assume that the charges were dropped after she was taken away.

Q: They were dropped, and she was fired the next day, the employer came out and threw in the face her paycheck, and then Neil Herring, the union lawyer took the case to the NLRB and they were able to win her back pay and rehiring.

A: Then she chose not to go back to work.

Q: She went back just for a day or two, as a symbolic gesture, then gave a little speech. What other workers have told me that I didn't know previously and I'm confirming with other people is that at one point the employer found out that the workers had gotten some names and addresses of the employers' customers, and that you were sending letters to these customers telling them not to buy his products because the workers were on strike, something that the employer didn't know. The way he found out, he saw a box full of envelopes with his customers' names and addresses in one of the workers' trucks. Were you aware of that situation, and he tried to see what was inside, and Adolfina Hernandez tried to cover it and he started pushing her and screaming at her, (so they used this to get Paulina's charges dropped.)

A: I wasn't aware of that specific instance, but I was aware that the names and addresses of the customers were being accumulated.

Q: Do you know in what ways?

A: Well, there's a variety of ways to get information. The best way is to go through the garbage. My
understanding is that we were collecting information that way.

Q: Adolfina says that she was also keeping a log, some data, before they decided to go on strike. Since you know so much about labor law, is that against the law?

A: To collect information? Not that I'm aware of.

Q: So, let’s continue, since we've done all those confirmations. Last time we were talking about PSG Fisheries, and we stopped when you were talking about the campaign for justice, when the company decided they wanted to fight in the NLRB court to block certification. Can you continue?

A: Well, the other stuff with Calliope is that during the holiday season in the end of that year we organized some efforts to distribute information to the shows and to the people that went to the shows that Calliope participated in, you know, those holiday craft show things.

Q: Yes, people have been telling me, but, we've finished with Calliope. In our last interview we were talking about Point St. George Fisheries hiring the best anti-labor lawyers from San Francisco. They came to Santa Rosa and they had hearings, and the NLRB representative voted in favor of the workers, and it was again in the favor of the workers. Between the time they had the election and the time the company took it to the NLRB in Washington, what were the activities of the PSGF workers, to keep up the morale?

A: What I remember is that there was a series of noontime rallies at the plant gate, that we used to build support, and that there was a big effort to distribute leaflets after the election to all sections of the
community urging them to put pressure on the company to drop its--to recognize the union, and to drop the campaign to not do that, because of how overwhelming the election (vote) was. I remember going to churches with workers to talk to the churches about the campaign (for justice), and I remember printing a lot of leaflets for the effort. We had access to a printing press from the Paz Printers, the press we use to print the peace newsletter. That's as far as I remember. As I recall, it started like in the middle of the summer that we started having informational picket lines, and then sent people out into the community to distribute leaflets. We stopped it because it was not productive, was my reaction. Then, what happened after that, (hesitation, trying to recollect)--between the summer and the time it was certified, I know that the workers were divided up into a bunch of different committees, and I worked with one committee that was responsible for outreach to other unions and community groups, and was involved in political stuff.

Q What was the company doing at the same time, do you recall? Any layoffs, firings? The company started moving fish to other plants that they had.

A: Yeah, there was a real--they did start to cut back on the amount of work, people's hours were reduced incredibly. But a lot of that started happening before the election, as I recall, and it continued on through, and they would blame it on different things in terms of the fish and stuff, but everyone else felt that it was in retaliation for their effort to organize.

Q What did the union do to help?

A: I'm not aware that the union did much of anything in regards to that. I think that people were sent to other places to talk to other outlets that the company had. I
think that people were fired for different things, there were some brothers that were fired, their names escape me.

Q: Carmello and Pablo Mendoza? Oh, no, the brothers, yes, I don't remember their names.

A: There was an unfair labor practice filed on their behalf. In terms of all the specifics, unless you help me remember.

Q: Well I haven't talked to the workers yet, only Alicia Sanchez. After one and one half to two years of SEIU existence, according to Alicia, Newman and Alicia began discussing among themselves because they were husband and wife, that it was very crazy-making for them to have a full-time job and then a full time job being volunteers for the union. They pursued the idea of talking to different unions, and the one that was doing it was Newman. Do you recall those events?

A: The affiliation process? Yes, pretty much.

Q: It's also my understanding that they started working on it before they consulted with the workers.

A: I wouldn't be able to answer that, but it's true that when the union was formed in January 1988, that Alicia was working full time for CHDC, and that was right at the beginning of the most recent wave of the citizenship and all that kind of stuff, and that in addition to her job for CHDC was inundated with a lot of the technical work related to helping people process their citizenship papers and immigration status. So, even in relation to the union, a lot of the workers who were working for the different companies were also interested in using Alicia's skills in that regard, too, so she really was doing three jobs. Working full time for CHDC, working to help organize the
union, really as the main organizer, and she was doing all this immigration stuff, and then her home life. (The immigration work) was connected to her job at CHDC, but there were extra things, too, that wasn't the only thing she was involved with there. So, and then Newman, in terms of working for wages, I don't recall him having a job. My understanding is that he was supposed to be studying for the bar, and then all this other stuff came up that took his time. So, the strike went on and off as an independent union, the victory at PSGF in terms of the election was won as an independent union, and people began to feel that those strengths would be added to by affiliating...

Q: Who is that "people"?

A: Well, I mean, I felt that way, I think that Newman and Alicia felt that way, other people who were kind of in the orbit of the support for the strikes and the election, you know, other community people, other union people, other people in the CP as well, both locally and regionally, but the details of it were always at issue. The main concern that existed, I think from everyone's part, was the kinds of experiences that had happened in other situations where unions were representing large groups of Mexican workers, and the experience that everyone pointed to to avoid, not wanting to have anything to do with, is the Teamsters' local experience with the cannery workers in Sebastopol. It's a really horrible example of union representation, it's the worst example of corruption and racism, and really collaboration with the employer that's around. It in the main affected Mexican workers, Mexican women who worked in those canneries. So that was the experience that they had had with organized labor, you know, so the question of being independent made a lot more sense than connecting with something that looked anything remotely like what the Teamsters experience was. So, with that in mind, we were looking
for what kinds of ways could affiliating to an existing union add strength to the experience that had been accumulated without repeating or going down the path of what the Teamsters had already done. So, a number of unions began to make proposals, is my recollection.

Q: Also, Newman started going to talk to unions, presenting the work that had been done with these Mexican workers.

A: With the perspective of affiliating? I don’t recall that. I mean, that’s not part of my recollection of how things happened. My understanding is that other unions began to make proposals, the Carpenters Union put out a proposal early on to affiliate to the CU, and it was just put on hold, nothing was really done one way or the other. Nobody ever pursued it, for a variety of reasons. People didn’t feel it was a good fit.

Q: Okay, you’re talking about the “people”, CP members, community people, etc., but were the workers ever consulted?

A: I think that the Calliope workers were consulted about becoming Carpenters, that’s my recollection, is that it was talked about, and kind of put on hold. It was that small group of people. But what the Carpenters did is that they made space available in their complex for the Union to have an office, and to have meetings out of, and all that kind of stuff. Now, the other proposals that came forward, I don’t know where they went, one was from the UFCW, I never got any clear details of that, just that they were interested.

Q: Did they go and talk to the Union representatives, meaning Newman and Alicia, or were they giving Alicia and Newman proposals on paper?
A: I think that it was all talk, that's my understanding. Now, the proposal from SEIU came out of the International organizing--what is it, one of the departments in the International. The person who was from SEIU who was the most interested in pursuing it was--his name escapes me at the moment.

Q Michael Allen?

A: No, what Michael Allen (General Manager of Local 707) did was help put the people together. In 1988, there was an International Convention of SEIU in Toronto, Canada. Michael was sent from the local to the convention, and one of the things he did at the convention was to talk to people in the International about what was happening in Sonoma County with the organization of the Sonoma County Industrial Union. He talked to them from the perspective of what could SEIU International do to help. There was a person who he had talked to about this who was very interested in pursuing this, who eventually got together with Newman and Alicia, and there were many conversations. That was the basis upon which the proposal for affiliation was crafted. The person's name: I can't remember it.

Q You better remember it, because Alicia...

A: (Laughs) I know. What's really, I mean part of the problem is that what happened from within SEIU and SCIU was the shifting of people who were responsible from the International's point of view. The way the agreement was crafted in terms of what people voted on--the members of SCIU voted to affiliate to SEIU as an independent division of SEIU 707 in the end of 1988, beginning of 1989, somewhere in there.

Q According to Alicia, she went on and on for like two and a half years without a salary--
A: No, no, it started earlier, because in the beginning of 198--

Q: Is there a way I can get access to documents from SEIU?

A: From our local? Probably, I probably could get you some documents. I'll look into it. But it was about that time. Barbara Perotti was President, I was VP, end of '88, beginning of '89. The beginning of '89 was when Newman and Alicia began to go to Calistoga, right?

Q: Wasn't it '90?

A: No, it was that whole first year, first part of '89.

Q: Okay, so SEIU gave a proposal to Alicia and Newman.

A: Well, there were discussions about what was involved, what perspective, how it could work, all this kind of stuff.

Q: It was all talk, nothing on paper?

A: A lot of it was talk, there were some things written. There should be a file at SEIU, but one of the problems was that the specific arrangement, the financial arrangement, was not written down in terms of the agreement between the International, the local, and SCIU, in terms of the subsidy.

Q: And also dues from the workers?

A: Right. The whole thing. You see, because the concern that the International had in terms of supporting an organizing effort like SCIU was that it be based through an existing local, until such time that the effort takes off to such a degree that they could form their own
local or something along those lines. They were not comfortable in giving money directly to independent unions, so that's what the affiliation was all about, was to form a partnership through which the International could support, could give money, to sustain the organizing drive that SCIU was undertaking. With that was to come a lot of advice and experience and direction and support and resources, and all that kind of stuff. So, what happened was that, this is where the names come in, because the person who helped craft this whole thing—Newman probably remembers the guy's name—I only met him once or twice, he doesn't remember his name? I'll have to think about it. Michael Allen would definitely remember his name. He was in charge of some division in Washington to head up some national work on this, they got the approval from the International to go ahead in this way, the local was interested in pursuing this. Essentially what it meant was that SCIU, the Industrial Union, would affiliate to the local as an independent division. They would have representation on the Executive Board, and that it wouldn't cost the local, this is one thing that the people on the local Executive Board were concerned about, was how much time would it cost, how much money would it cost. It wouldn't cost the local in terms of time and resources other than what could be generated in terms of volunteer time. In other words, there was not going to be local dues money from the public employees spent to subsidize the private employees. That was to come from the International, the International was to make a year-to-year obligation in terms of what they would support. In 1991, it began to unravel, their support began to diminish. It diminished to the point where the International decided that they weren't going to spend any more money on this, and by 1991 had essentially come to the position that if the unit's going to continue within SEIU, it should be affiliated to the janitor's local out of San Francisco, and that's what happened. I don't know what the situation
was with that, if there was a vote or not a vote. The jurisdiction of the group was taken off of 707 and put to Local 87, Alicia went to work for Local 87, of which part of her responsibilities were to be of service to workers here. In that interim, Calliope moved away, they shut down and moved away, and in the same interim, PSGF closed down, so that it was left with nothing.

Q: Let's go back to when they started making the proposals. How did the Union reps take it to the workers, and who decided that the reps should be the ones to be the Union organizers, the paid workers. It is my understanding that Paulina Martinez at that time was unemployed and that she had gained experience in terms of union organizing.

A: I don't remember specifically. My sense would be that the International was giving the money to support SCIU, and my assumption would be that that is how it was worked out (that it was predicated on NS and AS being the paid organizers). I don't know if there was anything written down like that, but that was pretty much the page that everyone seemed to be on.

Q: Okay. So, the workers vote.

A: The workers vote to affiliate, essentially their vote was to affiliate to our local, Local 707, as an independent division, as an industrial division. So, they became members of 707, but still maintained their ability to make decisions in terms of affairs that affected them in particular. At the time, though, there was a lot of overlap, I would say significant interest amongst members of 707 and the effort within the industrial division, SCIU. There were a lot of people who volunteered, there were bus drivers who (were involved in) an escalated bus struggle. In the beginning of '89 there was a bus strike. There were other county
employees, other social service workers, who were interested in what was happening, and were supportive. There was a lot of crossover in terms of things that were happening.

Q: What were the (SCIU) workers' responsibilities towards the union.

A: Well, my understanding is that it was to be successful in organizing, to be successful in organizing where they had started, and win contracts, and to move on to other organizing prospects.

Q: What about dues?

A: Well, yes, the dues would come after the contracts, when the contracts were successful. The only contract that was ever agreed to was the PSGF. Calliope never had a contract. So, it was a difficult thing, I mean I'm not sure exactly where it came down in terms of the dues for workers without contracts, like at Calliope. I was not involved in any of that stuff. But that's where SEIU was at, in terms of winning contracts and the dues money associated with that. Now, they wouldn't get all the dues, they would get a percentage per member. They call it a per capita, and all affiliated unions to the Int'l pay it.

Q: Did they ever give any dues to SEIU?

A: I have no idea. Millie Tripp would know, she was the treasurer of the Local, it would be interesting for you to talk to her and see what she recalls of this period.

Q: How was the CP feeling about all this affiliation, were you working toward affiliation, or was the CP kind of on the side at this point.

A: I think that generally speaking, the Party group
supported that, because it seemed to be an affiliation
that would help build on the strengths of what had already
been achieved in a way that didn't go down the path of the
problems that were associated with other things. It was
a way to get money from an International union and still
maintain a significant degree of autonomy in terms of
how the affairs are managed, how business is conducted,
where things go in terms of resources, things like that;
how people are represented, really. The affiliation per se
I don't think contributed to the problems in the early part,
right after the affiliation. I think what happened is there
were some bad choices made in terms of where to
concentrate resources. Looking back on it, right after the
affiliation, SCIU began to get queries from Calistoga
Bottling workers about their situation, and they began to
kind of move on that, on what had appeared to be an
interest generated, to organize in Calistoga, which was
30 miles away from Santa Rosa, a significant distance.
There was a choice made--I don't recall being terribly
involved in making that choice, but my assumption is that
people within SEIU, the International, who were helping
Alicia and Newman were involved in making the choice,
and maybe some other people, I'm not sure.

Q: So they went on and started organizing the
Calistoga workers.

A: Yeah, wasn't that in '89? I'm trying to remember
that guy from the International, see, because he had a
very good approach in terms of understanding all that was
involved, he saw it more as a long term thing and not so
much in terms of the benchmarks the bureaucrats in the
labor movement see in terms of producing new members
with dues and all that kind of stuff. He was more
understanding in terms of a political process that takes
some time to build. What happened with him was that
after the affiliation was formed, he left his post in the
International in Washington and moved back to Oregon, and
he was like a regional person for the West Coast. That only lasted for a short period of time, he had some kind of problem, I don't know if it was a physical problem, an emotional problem, he had some kind of problem in terms of his ability to function that he was going through at that time. I think his name was Michael--I can't remember his last name right now. Anyways, he quickly became out of the picture from the beginning, and there were other people who stepped in and were managing and stuff like that, and it wasn't the same. They didn't come to it with the same degree of understanding, and they didn't come to it with the same degree of expectation. I think it was those people who helped advise Alicia and Newman to move the effort in a different direction, which began in the beginning of 1989, away from work that had been done in Sonoma County to the organizing prospect in Napa County at the Calistoga Bottling plant. It was kind of put as this view of, well, where could this union find a niche to organize in, and bottling was an area that seemed like it could be pursued.

Q: How could they start pursuing another place to organize when they had not accomplished anything in these two other places?

A: Well, they tried--and everyone tried--to keep things together in both places. At PSGF there was all this stuff that was outstanding in terms of the certification, and in terms of the technical stuff to go forward in terms of negotiating a contract, that wasn't going to happen until the election was certified, and the company was appealing it and stuff. So, as I recall, the decision from Washington about the certification came through about the middle of the Calistoga drive. Then, even at Calliope there was a lot of outstanding things in terms of Paulina's case and other stuff that was still pending, so that even though they were without a contract--the feeling was that the stuff in Sonoma County was at a
place that it could be put on hold to devote some time in Calistoga, to have a successful campaign.

Q: How did the workers at Calliope and PSGF feel about their reps going on to organize Calistoga?

A: I don't know for sure, but I would assume that they didn't feel real great, and felt somewhat abandoned. This was at a time when I was more--I don't recall what I was specifically doing, but I was not as involved in day to day stuff with SCIU as I had been before.

Q: Okay, because some of them have mentioned that -- they have not mentioned the specifics of Calistoga organizing or affiliation, but they have mentioned that at a certain point they were all left out, that something that had started, they put us on the burner and then they didn't remove us, so we got scorched.

A: Yes, that would have been this period. At that time for me, what was happening was that the beginning of '89 was a period which started a pretty--well, I would call it a pretty serious attack on me personally--at the Labor Council, where in January or February '89 the Labor Council elects its officers, and I was nominated to be an Executive Board officer. Everyone who was running, except for the race for Vice President of the Council, was a white ballot, in other words there was only one candidate running, so that there was no opposition. In the office of Vice President, a group of us in the Labor Council had nominated Michael Allen to run against Rich Clary. Rich Clary was a real old time, pretty conservative labor person from the Electricians' Union, and was very much part of the Old Guard, in terms of keeping the Council as it had been for the last 30 years, things like that. So, for Michael to challenge him in a contested election for office, it really put the right-wing forces on the move. The election, as it turned out, was very close,
it was like three or four votes, 21-17. Rich won and Michael lost, but that meeting where the election happened, it was a very bizarre situation where one of the other members of the Electrical Workers' union was also elected to the Executive Board, after the results were announced, got up and immediately resigned from the Executive Board because he could not serve on an Executive Board with other members of the Executive Board who were so unpatriotic as to not say the Pledge of Allegiance, which he was referring to me and to several other people. Because when it was time to say that we chose not to say it, for a variety of reasons. And, additionally, he and others were very pissed off, really, that my local, 707, had supported in the previous election in 1988 for Congress not the Democratic incumbent, Doug Bosco, but the Peace & Freedom candidate, Eric Fried, who also happened to be a member of the Communist Party. So, that violated the rules, a strict interpretation of some of the rules of the Labor Council, and they were seeking a form of redress against our delegates, myself included, and the Local for having violated their rules, and they wanted to form essentially a witch hunt. So, it was a very tumultuous period for me personally because of having to go through all this stuff, being newly seated on the Executive Board, and then met with essentially this witch hunt coming down by all these right wing labor people. So, that's what I recall was also happening with me. So, in terms of the specifics of what was happening with Calistoga, I didn't pay attention to it.

Q: Do you remember the lawyer who was volunteering for the Union, Neil Herring. More or less at the same time that SCIU affiliated to SEIU, Neil left the Union, he stopped volunteering, and then some other lawyers started coming to fill his position. Do you know why he left?

A: Well, I wasn't there when this happened, but I
understand that there was a big fight. What I heard was that there was a big difference and a big fight between Neil and Alicia and Newman, I think it had to do with how to handle a problem, I never really got much into this. It seemed to me personally that Neil and Newman didn't get along very well, the details of which, you know, I was not that involved, didn't pay that much attention to it. It seemed to me it was kind of like more of an ego thing than any political thing.

Q: But from your point of view, Neil Herring was being very successful in bringing victories to the Union.

A: I don't know, I mean I thought that this happened earlier, the blowout with Neil. My recollection was that it happened at the end of '88. It could have happened afterwards, I'm not real sure.

Q: It was more or less at the same time that Alicia and Newman were receiving the proposals from SEIU, and Alicia and Newman were getting the last details on how much money they were going to be making.

A: Yes, a lot of that stuff happened at the end of '88, because there was the vote, so I think it happened then. Yeah, I mean, I wasn't that involved in how things were working in relation to Neil's work as a volunteer, as a lawyer volunteer, in terms of volunteering to do the legal end of what needed to be done.

Q: Okay, then at the beginning of the interview, Paul, you started discussing the fall of the Union and the CP simultaneously, more or less. Can you discuss first how the Union began falling apart?

A: Well, personally I think that the Union began to move in a downward direction when the Calistoga drive started. It took so many resources away from what had
been built in Santa Rosa that weren't able to stand on their own, and moved it away, that was the beginning of the turn from my point of view. Then, the results of the election in Calistoga just accelerated that. It was a pretty resounding defeat in terms of the representation, I think it was maybe not quite 2:1, but it was a really significant defeat. I think part of the problem with the defeat had to do with some of the tactics that were used, as I understood, in relation to the fight against racism. It was my understanding, and I participated in one meeting with the people from the International who would come on a regular basis to review things with Newman and Alicia. It was their suggestion that Newman and Alicia downplay the racist relations that the Company was using to divide people up, to not make issues of that in the organizing, to really kind of low-key it, because it would be expedient, they said it would create more problems, it would be more divisive if you fought it. My understanding is that a lot of things were conceded to on that, and that questions of the racist relations and disparate treatment between different people and all that kind of stuff, it was lost. When you downplay the racism at work, you lose the ability to win over workers from different backgrounds because of their common interests as workers. If you play into that, you play into the natural segregation. I think that's what happened--I mean, there were a lot of other things that people who were more involved in it would probably have a better viewpoint, or more fleshed out analysis of it. From where I sat, it seemed that following the advice of the International to downplay the struggle against racism played into the results that came. It was a pretty devastating loss, considering the amount of time and energy that had been put in, and it had an effect on everything else, because if they had come back from Calistoga with a victory, it would have added to, not taken away from, what had happened in Sonoma County.
But to come back to Santa Rosa with a loss, it was demoralizing, and all this other stuff had gone undone, and it really cemented in my view the turn. You know, I hold all of us responsible, but in particular, in terms of the people involved in giving the advice from the SEIU International, it was such a change that I kind of hold them more responsible, because they should have known better than to do what they did. Then, after the election it was like, they washed their hands and were gone, and then a year later they're talking about moving the whole operation to another local, the Janitors' local, which the reasoning for that was really, it too capitulated to the racism involved with the whole situation.

Q: What was happening with the Calliope and PSGF workers and Alicia and Newman at the same time?

A: I don't know, because at that point my relationship with a lot of the workers there had diminished, and there are probably people who are really critical of that in terms of my moving away.

Q: I also understand that while all this was happening, the CP was very involved, organizing, supporting, helping. What was the breakfast club, how did this come about?

A: Well, the Party used to meet in the evenings, after work, you know, once every two weeks, something like that. Now, there were different subgroups designed to do different things, and there was a group from the Party that was looking into more detailed review and analysis of different things associated with the campaign that would meet for breakfast, because most people worked, and most people had to be at work at 8 or 9 or whatever, so that instead of having another night to meet, which was very hard, it was thought to meet for breakfast someplace. So what I recall is that we used to meet at Lyons a few times, which is that restaurant in the County Center,
which is where I used to work, so it was convenient for me, you know, from 7 to 8. It was essentially kind of like a subgroup.

Q: Was that functional, was that helpful to the workers? Were the decisions that were made taken back to the workers? How were the dynamics happening?

A: Well, I didn’t go to a lot of the meetings with the workers, so in terms of how things were communicated back and forth, I wouldn’t be the person to comment on that.

Q: To your knowledge, Paul, were the workers aware of the CP in their activity?

A: Well, some workers were. I know that in the PSGF committee, Eric and I were on the committee with Celia and Susana Garcia and a few other people, and there were several times when we talked about CP stuff, that I was in the Party, that Eric was running for Congress as a Communist, so we talked a little about that. The reaction I recall is that oh well, it’s not a bad thing, it’s not a thing to get upset about, the more important thing is what are people doing to help in this struggle. But in terms of other groups of workers, I don’t know.

Q: Let’s go back to the fall of the Union and the CP simultaneously. You lost the elections in Calistoga, PSGF was in disarray...

A: Yes, I guess the decision about certification had come through in the middle of that, so they began negotiating. In terms of Newman and Alicia’s role in the union, they were splitting up and going in different directions. So, what complements each of them had toward each other was skewed because Newman had left working with the Union, and I think had even moved out of
the area, I don't remember. He moved to Sacramento for a while, and I don't remember how quickly it was after that. It may have been a few months. So, after the Calistoga thing, there was kind of an effort for the people in the Party to help put things back together with SCIU, and people would volunteer to staff the office and do different things that they could contribute, in terms of clerical skills or accounting skills, stuff like that. But, everything kind of got stalled, and my recollection with the contract talks with PSGF, it went on for a while. I think it was in April of '90.

Q Now that you look back, how do you see the role of the Communist Party and the role of the union reps in all this union organizing effort. How do you view the very short life of Sonoma County Industrial Union, that had a very huge potential to work and to continue organizing workers. From your own view, what worked and what didn't work with SCIU, because it was the first real Mexican independent union that had huge potential.

A: Well, I think the tactics that involved people coming together to fight for something better worked, in terms of the election victories at the workplaces were very successful. What didn’t work was...

Q Well, the workers were also very ripe to be organized in both places.

A: Yes, they were very supportive, a high level of understanding.

Q And I don’t know how the racial composition was in Calistoga, but do you think...

A: It was mixed.

Q It was mixed, whereas in Calliope and PSGF, the
majority of the labor was Mexican, who were already very, very fed up. The conditions were given in those two places, so probably even without many efforts and tactics the election could have been won.

A: Yes, but I think the other things that worked in relation to that was the community support, the other labor support, the labor community coming together around supporting these workers' rights to organize and stuff. Some of the things which can be learned from it is, how do you take that and organize successful contracts so that it has some life after the initial campaign, and those are the kind of things that then you get into the details of running and maintaining an organization. My view of what went wrong was trying to--not giving enough time to consolidate gains that were made, and instead going off to try to organize a new place which in the end was not successful. It created a situation where people were unable to come back and to reconnect with what had been built several months before. We were never able to get on the other side of that spiral that had begun to happen. The International union wasn't willing to pay, to subsidize for the necessary time to be able to do that.

Q: Did you have working with you people with labor experience, in terms of not only organizing, but sitting at the negotiating table, knowing how to write contracts, to come with a proposal instead of waiting for the bosses to come with a proposal to you. Did you have that kind of people with such skills?

A: Where?

Q: In SCIU. Before the affiliation, did you have people with these kind of skills within your ranks?

A: Well, peripherally, yes. The people who were kind of leading the effort didn't have the skills per se, but there
were other people within the effort who had those kind of skills. It wasn't really seen as something that the effort needed, in terms of an expertise at the negotiating table. It wasn't, I think because of our general inexperience, it wasn't seen that we needed some help in that area, until after the fact.

Q: What's interesting to me, in talking with workers, is that the Union was formed in March of 1989, and then the workers go on strike at the beginning of July, three months after they have formed the union.

A: The election was in March.

Q: The election, yes, so let's say they were certified in April. Three months later they decide to go on strike, and it is my understanding that several workers discussed the pros and cons--well, not the pros and cons, because all of them have told me that they had no idea whatsoever, with capital letters, what a strike was all about. They may have been explained by their representatives, but not fully explained, and that they have discussed about the peak production time, which didn't start in July, but started in October. How is that--the workers had no experience, so they could not decide when to go on strike, and they could not also view what the strike was all about. But the people with experience who were helping and supporting them could guide them to wait to go on strike, and to look for other tactics, to wait until October, because it is my perception, from what I heard from workers, that they were led, blindly, to this strike, number one, and number two, that because they were blindly led to this strike, they in some ways helped the employer train and prepare the scabs, so that when the peak time in October came, these scabs had been working for three months already and had been trained for three months. The Union had no funds, so they had no money to survive during the strike. So, how did your group, CP and representatives and
community members, see this thing happening. Did you have any people with experience saying wait a second, this is not going to work.

A: People weren't involved in that level, I mean I wasn’t. I never participated in those meetings, or heard those kind of questions that workers had about, you know, maybe we shouldn't go on strike now, maybe we should go on strike another time. I wasn’t part of that.

Q: Who was part of that?

A: I would assume that Alicia and Newman were part of that, in terms of being led blindly, I have no comment, because I wasn’t part of the meetings where those decisions were made. If people didn't get all the information, or they were given half information, I have no idea.

Q: So, nobody from your group participated in those meetings, CP, people in community, participated in those meetings besides Alicia and Newman and the workers.

A: As far as my understanding. I don’t know.
Third Part

Supporting Documents
ORGANIZE
Sara Ochoa, (wearing T-shirt "ORGANIZE"), Adolfina Hernandez, workers, Calliope Designs, Laura Larque

Rally at Calliope Designs
Left, Alicia Caballero, center, Javier Arreguin, right, Elena Pulido, Calliope Designs workers

Left, Alicia Sanchez and Paulina Martinez with daughter
Workers of Point St. George Fisheries
Celia mendoza holding a "Seguranza para Mujeres" (Insurance for Women) sign, Point St. George Fisheries

Rally outside Point St. George Fisheries premises
Left:
Point St. George Fisheries workers

Below:
Paul Kaplan, center, wearing cap
Newman Strawbridge and Alicia Sanchez, Union Organizers

Neil Herring, Lawyer
I WANT TO BECOME AN ASSOCIATE/POLITICAL MEMBER OF S.C.I.U.,
PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

Name: ________________________________
Address: ______________________________
City: _____________ Zip Code: ________
Telephone Number: ____________________
Church or Community Action Group:
____________________________________
How Much Do You Wish to Contribute Monthly?
☐ $5  ☐ $10  ☐ More [How Much?: ________]

Return to:

Sonoma County Industrial Union
1700-B Corby Avenue, Santa Rosa CA 95407
For More Information, Please Call 571-7559
SI SE QUIERE SER MIEMBRO POLITICO ASOCIADO DEL SINDICATO, PONGA LA SIQUIENTE INFORMACION:

Nombre______________________________________

Direccion______________________________________

Ciudad________________ Zona Postal____________

Numero de Telefono___________________________

Nombre de la Compania Donde Trabaja

______________________________________________

Cuant0 Quiere Contribuir al Mes?

☐ $5 ☐ $10 ☐ Mas (La Cantidad? $_______)

Regreselo a:

El Sindicato Industrial del Condado de Sonoma
1700-B Corby Ave Santa Rosa, CA 95407
Para mas informacion, llame al 571-7559
Trabajadores Latinos Se Defendan en el Condado de Sonoma

- PLANTA PROCESADORA DE PESCADO, POINT ST. GEORGE. La mayoría de los trabajadores votaron por la elección del Sindicato Industrial del Condado de Sonoma, pero el patrón dice que el Sindicato no tiene el derecho de representar a los trabajadores. Para esto ha inventado más de 60 quejas legales en contra de la compañía, organizadores del sindicato y los resultados de las elecciones. Todo esto ha sido usado para quebrantar la union, para evadir negociaciones con los trabajadores y darles un aumento justo de salarios. Los trabajadores de Point St. George no tienen beneficios, ganan en su mayoría el mínimo, y tienen que pagar el costo del equipo necesario para trabajar.

- CALLIOPE DESIGNS. Después de 10 semanas de estar en huelga los trabajadores de Calliope Designs regresaron a trabajar sin un contrato colectivo para poder mantener vivo el sindicato (S.I.U.S.-S.C.I.U.), no obstante los trabajadores continuarán su lucha desde dentro de la fábrica.

- PLANTA DE HONGOS EN HEALDSBURG. Los trabajadores están organizados con el Sindicato de Los Teamsters y están en huelga para obtener mejores condiciones de trabajo. Aunque la huelga continua los trabajadores han recibido un apoyo por parte de la comunidad, pero lo hacen sentirse aislados.

- TRABAJADOROS IMIGRANTES. Los trabajadores del campo de Alexander Vally sin tener una casa para vivir fueron forzados a vivir bajo el puente de Healdsburg, sin contar agua potable. Este problema finalmente llamó la atención de la comunidad de este condado debido a la poca sanidad y su problemática. Sus soluciones propuestas incluyen: baños portátiles y el urgimiento a los reconstruccionistas para que provean tiendas de campaña. La necesidad de proveer casas no ha sido mencionado.

- BOYCOT DE UVAS. Diferentes grupos de la comunidad han hecho demostraciones enfrente de mercados locales en apoyo de la lucha del Sindicato Unido de Los Trabajadores del Campo (United Farm Workers Union) y para protestar por la venta de las uvas rociada con pesticidas y sin sindicato.

- ABULONE AND SEA URCHIN FISHERIES. Los trabajadores del condado de Mendocino han reportado abusos numerosos en contra de mujeres las cuales han sido violadas por sus supervisores y las han amenazado con la pérdida de su vida si hacen reporte alguno.

Todos estos ejemplos ilustran como los patrones rehúsan a pagar salarios justos y condiciones de trabajo justas a trabajadores chicanos y mexicanos en este condado. Los patrones no quieren dejar de obtener sus ganancias a costa de la explotación de los trabajadores mexicanos. Los patrones han emprendido una campaña mucho más racista y sexista en contra de los mexicanos que se han levantado he incorporado en la lucha. Esto quiere decir que los patrones no aprueban la lucha por los derechos civiles.

UNETE A LA LUCHA POR LOS DERECHOS CIVILES

*Dona material o apoyo económico a los trabajadores en huelga.
*Plática a tus amigas(os) acerca de esta lucha.
*Dile a los patrones que no aprueban su conducta y que no est bien que sigan obteniendo sus ganancias a costa de la explotación de la raza, (llama o escribe a Dorr Eddy a Calliope Designs: 539-7178 o al 527-7178, por ejemplo.)
*Incorporate a un grupo de apoyo: llama al 526-6466.
LATINO WORKERS
NEED YOUR SUPPORT

After a 12-week strike, workers at Calliope Designs in Santa Rosa recently returned to work without a contract in order to save their union (Sonoma County Industrial Union) and continue the fight for fair treatment.

Calliope is the nation's largest maker of dough Christmas ornaments. All workers are paid piece rate with no sick leave, union security or seniority and no more than one week's paid vacation. Work conditions are very poor, and the owners have lowered the piece rate each of the last three years. Until the strike, all production workers were Mexican (and most were women) and all supervisors were white.

Rather than accept the just demands of the workers, the owners spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on high-priced union-busting lawyers, security guards and two dozen scabs (replacement workers). Although they lost further thousands through lost production and missed orders, the owners preferred to lose money rather than change their racist employment practices, and made an unacceptable "final offer" to the union. The strikers had to return to work or risk losing their jobs permanently to the scabs. So they took the struggle inside.

THE STRIKE IS OVER, BUT THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE CONTINUES!
COMMUNITY SUPPORT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER.

YOU CAN HELP LATINO WORKERS WIN FULL CIVIL RIGHTS:

*JOIN US ON THE PICKET LINE ANY DAY FROM 6:30-8 A.M. & 4-5 P.M., BUT ESPECIALLY TUESDAY & THURSDAY. CALLIOPE IS AT 475 TESCONI CIRCLE #10, IN THE SANTA ROSA BUSINESS PARK ON DUTTON AVE. BETWEEN COLLEGE & GUERNEVILLE RD.
*JOIN OUR WEEKLY POTLUCK LUNCHES FRIDAYS AT NOON.
*SPEND FIVE MINUTES MAKING THREE KEY PHONE CALLS THAT WORK.
FIRST, CALL WADE HOFER AT SECURITY PACIFIC BANK AND ASK WHY THEY LOAN MONEY TO A COMPANY THAT MISTREATS ITS WORKERS (HIS NUMBER IS 545-3031).
SECOND, CALL KAREN LOCKHART, LOCAL SALES REPRESENTATIVE FOR CALLIOPE, AND ASK WHY SHE HANDLES CALLIOPE PRODUCTS (539-6037).
THIRD, CALL THE OWNERS, DORM & STEPHANIE EDDY, AND ASK WHY THEY UNJUSTLY ACCUSED AND FIRED UNION MEMBER PAULA MARTINEZ. DEMAND THEY REHIRE HER AND NEGOTIATE A FAIR CONTRACT WITH THE UNION. THEIR NUMBER IS 539-7178 OR 527-7178.

*DONATE MONEY TO THE UNION, MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO SCIU AND MAIL TO 1700 CORBY AVENUE, SANTA ROSA CA 95407.

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP. TOGETHER, WE SHALL OVERCOME!

LEAFLET PRODUCED BY COMMUNITY-LABOR COALITION TO SUPPORT SCIU FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO HELP, CALL 527-6418, 526-6466 OR 579-4603.
PLEASE! DON'T SHOP

at

Christmas on the Mall!

as long as they sell the products of the union-busting company

CALLIOPE DESIGNS OF SANTA ROSA.

CALLIOPE is involved in a labor dispute with its workers, who recently struck for 12 weeks and have not yet reached agreement on a contract. Please help the workers by only entering this store to tell the boss that you won't buy here while they are selling Calliope ornaments. Tell him that you think EVERYONE deserves a Merry Christmas, including the workers who make Christmas tree ornaments, and who go without family health insurance while the owners take trips to Europe every year.

Thank you, and MERRY CHRISTMAS to you and yours. We are the

COMMUNITY-LABOR SUPPORT COALITION

CALLIOPE
We are on strike against Calliope Designs for its unfair labor practices and failure to bargain in good faith with our union, the Sonoma County Industrial Union. We are mostly Mexican women, very poorly paid, with no seniority or benefits. Although we voted for our union back in March, we'll have no contract, and were forced to go on strike on July 15.

Since we are a new union, we have no strike fund, and will only win through the support of the community. Our weekly luncheon gatherings on the picket line—trade unionists, church members and community people, own, Black and White, young and old—are putting a lot of pressure on the company to settle the strike. Please help us win basic economic justice.

EVERY FRIDAY, NOON
POTLUCK—BRING FOOD/DRINK TO SHARE
475 Tesconi Circle #10, Santa Rosa
(off Dutton Ave. between Guerneville & College in Santa Rosa Business Park)

HAT ELSE YOU CAN DO:
all, write or visit Dorr and Stephanie Eddy, owners of Calliope signs, Inc, at 475 Tesconi Circle, Santa Rosa CA 95401, phone number 527-8. Tell them to negotiate a fair contract.
join our picket line at Calliope, Monday through Friday, 7 a.m.-4 p.m. It is especially needed between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m. and 3:30-4:30 p.m. when the scabs (replacement workers) arrive and leave.
donations of money and/or food to S.C.I.U., 1700 Corby Avenue, Santa Rosa CA 95407.

CALLIOPE DESIGN WORKERS
SONOMA COUNTY INDUSTRIAL UNION
FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 571-7559.
SINDICATO INDUSTRIAL
Sonoma County Industrial Union

CELEBRA VICTORIA

El Sindicato Industrial va a firmar su historico Primer Contrato con Pt. St. George Fisheries el Viernes 22 de Febrero, 1991

Gracias a la dedicación de los trabajadores y al apoyo suyo, todos hemos ganado!

Come celebrate with us!

Viernes/Friday
Febrero/February 22, 1991
Buffet 5:00-6:30pm
Programma/Program 6:30-7:00pm
Balle/Dancing 5:00-9:00pm
Labor Center, 1700 Corby Avenue, Santa Rosa

labor donated
AFFILIATION AGREEMENT
between
SONOMA COUNTY INDUSTRIAL UNION (SCIU)
and
SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION LOCAL 707, AFL-CIO

PREAMBLE
This agreement of affiliation is entered into between the SONOMA COUNTY INDUSTRIAL UNION, an independent association hereinafter referred to as SCIU and the SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION, LOCAL 707, AFL-CIO, hereinafter referred to as SEIU Local 707.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES
SEIU Local 707 and SCIU have the common objectives and purposes to benefit their members and improve their living and working conditions by every appropriate means, and particularly to advance the social, economic and educational welfare of their members through organizing, political action, and collective bargaining. Both SEIU Local 707 and SCIU share the common purpose of promoting equality, workplace justice, and dignity for the working people of our community.
TERMS OF AFFILIATION BETWEEN SEIU LOCAL 707 AND SCIU

1. This agreement shall become effective upon approval by a majority vote of SCIU regular members voting, and upon approval of the Executive Board of Local 707 and will expire on January 1, 1994, at which time SCIU will become a division of SEIU Local 707.

SCIU ASSETS PROTECTED

2. All of the assets real and personal, tangible and intangible, including but not limited to any funds wherever situated which are the property of SCIU, including appreciation of existing property and any accretion, additions or accumulations to existing property are acknowledged to be property of SCIU and shall remain as property in the event of cessation, dissolution or disaffiliation.

SCIU SUPPORT AND AID

3. SEIU Local 707 shall make available, when requested, skilled negotiators to assist SCIU with collective bargaining. Local 707 when requested will provide lobbyists on issues of concern to SCIU members.

SEIU Local 707 will provide, when requested, research assistance such as salary and benefit surveys and programs in the structuring of members' health and retirement benefits and other research which supports SCIU in the bargaining process.

SEIU Local 707 will provide administrative and clerical support to SCIU staff and members.
MEMBER REPRESENTATIVE TRAINING

4. SEIU Local 707 will conduct, when requested member representative training programs for SCIU. SEIU Local 707 will provide the instruction and materials.

This program shall cover but shall not be limited to grievance handling, organizing, bargaining, retraining, research for collective bargaining and developing local data sources for research.

LOCAL 707 EXECUTIVE BOARD

5. Upon approval of this agreement SCIU will be entitled to one seat on the SEIU Local 707 Executive Board. All SCIU members will be full voting members of SEIU Local 707, with all membership rights and privileges.

SCIU for the purposes of this paragraph will be deemed to have 175 dues paying members. SCIU will be entitled to additional Executive Board seats per the following formula:

For each additional 150 dues paying members an additional Executive Board seat will be created for SCIU delegates.

The SCIU Division Director may participate as an ex-officio non-voting delegate at Local 707 Executive Board meetings. The local 707 General Manager may likewise sit as a non-voting ex-officio delegate on the SCIU Advisory Council.

An SEIU Local 707 Executive Board member will sit as a voting delegate on the SCIU Advisory Council.
DUES

6. Upon approval of this agreement SCIU members will pay full dues to SEIU Local 707. Any excess dues income will be earmarked for SCIU organizing activities. Excess income is defined as international subsidy plus dues receivable minus all expenses incurred by or on behalf of SCIU.

SCIU understands that Local 707 will not (and cannot) subsidize SCIU at the local level.

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

7. SCIU shall retain its current structure and operational guidelines. In the event this conflicts with the SEIU Local 707 Constitution and By-laws this portion of the agreement will be renegotiated.

Operational decisions affecting the Industrial/Manufacturing division of Local 707 (SCIU) will be made by the SCIU Advisory Council. It is agreed that any decisions involving the potential for major legal liabilities will require the review and approval of the Local 707 Executive Board and General Manager.

Staff Appointments for SCIU

The SCIU Advisory Board will appoint the Industrial Division Director and organizer(s). The Local 707 Board shall either affirm or veto the Advisory Board appointments.
REPORTING AND COORDINATION

8. The Division Director will make one monthly written report to the union's General Manager. The report will be designed to satisfy the reporting required by the International union. Additional reports as required by the Executive Board will be furnished.

The local's General Manager's report will be furnished to the SCIU Division Director and Advisory Council.

Full financial reports and disclosures shall be made available on a monthly basis.

RIGHT TO DISAFFILIATE

9. SCIU shall have the right to unilaterally disaffiliate at any time during the initial 5 years of this agreement after first submitting the question of disaffiliation to a membership secret ballot vote. SEIU Local 707 shall have the right to make a presentation to the SCIU Board of Directors and membership prior to the vote of the members on disaffiliation.

SEIU Local 707 shall also have the right to unilateral disaffiliation from SCIU at any time during this agreement by vote of its Executive Board. SCIU shall have the right to make a presentation to SEIU Local 707's Executive Board and membership.

SEVERABILITY

10. In the event any provision of this agreement is held to be invalid by any court in a final judgement or by an arbitrator pursuant to this agreement, such provision held illegal shall be
SEVERABILITY

10. In the event any provision of this agreement is held to be invalid by any court in a final judgement or by an arbitrator pursuant to this agreement, such provision held to be illegal shall be severed from the rest of the agreement and the remainder of the agreement shall remain in full force and effect.

ARBITRATION

11. Any disputes concerning the meaning and application of terms of this agreement shall, upon the request of either party, be referred to final and binding arbitration before an arbitrator mutually selected by the parties.

SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION, AFL-CIO, Local 707

President

Date: ____________________________

SONOMA COUNTY INDUSTRIAL UNION

Date: ____________________________
ACUERDO DE AFILIACION
entre
SINDICATO INDUSTRIAL DE TRABAJADORES DEL CONDADO DE SONOMA (SCIU)
y
SINDICATO INTERNACIONAL DE TRABAJADORES DE SERVICIO LOCAL 707, AFL-CIO (SEIU)

Preambulo
Este acuerdo de afiliación es una introducción entre el SINDICATO INDUSTRIAL DEL CONDADO DE SONOMA, una asociación independiente como se dice más adelante referido como SICS (SCIU) y el SINDICATO INTERNACIONAL DEL TRABAJADORES DE SERVICIO, LOCAL 707, AFL-CIO, como se dice más adelante referido como SITS (SEIU) Local 707.

PROPOSITOS Y OBJETIVOS
El Local 707 SEIU y SCIU tienen los objetivos y propósitos comunes de beneficiar a sus miembros y mejorar las condiciones de vivir y trabajo por medio de las medidas apropiadas, y en particular para el bienestar del avance social, económico y educacional de sus miembros por medio de su acción política organizada y del contrato colectivo. Los dos SEIU Local 707 y SCIU comparten el propósito común de promover igualdad, justicia en el trabajo y dignidad para la gente trabajadora de nuestra comunidad.

TERMINOS DE AFILIACION ENTRE SEIU LOCAL 707 Y SCIU
1. Este acuerdo deberá de ser efectivo bajo el apruebo de la mayoría de los votos de los miembros con derecho a votar de SCIU, y bajo el apruebo de la Mesa Ejecutiva del Local 707 el cual expirara el lero de Enero de 1994, tiempo en que SCIU bajo el convenio se convertira en una división de SEIU Local 707.

FONDOS PROTEGIDOS DE SCIU
2. Todos los fondos reales y personales, tangibles e intangibles, incluyendo pero no limitando a cualquier fondo donde sea que esten situados y que sean propiedad de SCIU, incluyendo la apreciación de la propiedad existente y de cualquier
acrecentamiento, adiciones o acumulaciones que existen en la propiedad y que son del conocimiento de ser de la propiedad de SCIU y que deberán de permanecer como propiedad del mismo en caso del cese, desolución o desafiliación.

SCIU APOYO Y AYUDA

3. SEIU Local 707 deberá de hacer disponibles, cuando sea requerido, negociadores hábiles e instruidos para la asistencia de SCIU con su colectiva negociadora, cuando sea requerido el Local 707 proveerá asistentes legisladores en temas que conciernen a los miembros de SCIU.

El Local 707 de SEIU proveerá, cuando sea requerido, asistencia en investigaciones en cuestiones como salarios y que beneficien inspecciones y programas para la estructura de la salud de los miembros así como beneficios de jubilación (retiro) y otras investigaciones que apoyen al proceso de negociaciones de SCIU.

El Local 707 de SEIU proveerá el apoyo administrativo y secretarial al personal y miembros de SCIU.

ENTRENAMIENTO DE LOS MIEMBROS REPRESENTATIVOS

4. El Local 707 de SEIU conducirá, cuando sea requerido, programas de entrenamientos para miembros representativos para SCIU. El Local 707 de SEIU proveerá la enseñanza y los materiales.

Este programa deberá de cubrir, pero no se debe de limitar a manejar los agravios, organización, negociación, reentrenamiento, investigaciones por contratos colectivos y desarrollo de los recursos locales por investigaciones.

LA MESA EJECUTIVA DEL LOCAL 707

5. Bajo aprobación de este acuerdo SCIU tendrá el derecho de una silla (puesto) en el Local 707 de SEIU en la Mesa Ejecutiva. Todos los miembros de SCIU tendrán el derecho de votar en el Local 707 de SEIU, con toda su membresía derechos y privilegios. Para los propósitos de este párrafo SCIU determinará el tener 175 miembros que paguen cuotas sindicales. SCIU tendrá el derecho de tener sillas (puestos) adicionales bajo la siguiente fórmula:

Por cada 150 miembros extra que paguen cuota se creará una silla (puesto) adicional en la Mesa Ejecutiva para los delegados de SCIU.

El Director de la División de SCIU puede participar como un delegado ex-oficio sin derecho a votar en las juntas de la Mesa Ejecutiva del Local 707. El Gerente General del Local 707 puede de manera similar tener una silla como delegado no votante ex-oficio en el Concilio de Consejo de SCIU.

Un miembro del Local 707 de SEIU de la Mesa Ejecutiva tendrá una
silla (puesto) como delegado votante en el Concilio de Consejo de SCIU.

CUOTAS

6. Bajo apruebo de este acuerdo los miembros de SCIU deberán pagar en su total las cuotas la Local 707 de SEIU. Cualquier ganancia proveniente del pago de las cuotas deberá de ser destinada para las actividades organizadoras de SCIU. Se define por exceso de ganancia el subsidio internacional más las cuotas recibibles menos los gastos ocurridos por o para SCIU. SCIU entiende que el Local 707 no (y no puede) subsidiar a SCIU a nivel local.

ESTRUCTURA DE ESTA RAMIFICACIÓN (SUCURSAL)

7. SCIU deberá de mantener la estructura corriente y las guías para su operación. En caso de conflictos con el Local 707 de SEIU su Constitución y Leyes (By-laws) la porción de este acuerdo deberá de ser renegociada. Las decisiones operacionales que afecten a la división de Manufacturación/Industrial de el Local 707 de SEIU serán hechas por el concilio del Consejo de SCIU. Se esta de acuerdo que cualquier decisión que impliquen el potencial de una responsabilidad legal mayor requerirá el revisamiento y apruebo de la Mesa Ejecutiva y el Gerente General de el Local 707.

PERSONAL DESTINADO POR SCIU

La Mesa Consejera de SCIU determinará quienes serán El Director y Organizador(es). La Mesa de el Local 707 deberá de confirmar o pondrá en veto las determinaciones de la Mesa Consejera.

COORDINACIÓN Y REPORTAJE

8. El Director de la Division deberá de escribir un reporte mensual al Gerente General del sindicato. Este reporte será designado para satisfacer los reportes requeridos por el sindicato internacional. Reportes adicionales serán requeridos por la Mesa Ejecutiva y deberán de ser llevados a cabo. El reporte del Gerente General Local deberá de ser proveído a el director de la división y el Concilio del Consejo. Reportes completos financieros y cuentas de los libros deberán de ser accesibles mensualmente.

DERECHOS DE DESAFILIACIÓN

9. SCIU deberá de tener el derecho unilateral de desafiliación en cualquier momento durante los 5 años de inicio de este acuerdo después de someter la primera cuestión de desafiliación a la membresía por medio de una votación secreta. El Local 707 de SEIU
debera de tener el derecho de presentarse a la Mesa Directiva de SCI U y su membresía antes de que estos voten para la desafiliación.
El Local 707 de SEIU deberá de tener también el derecho unilateral de desafiliación de SCI U en cualquier momento durante este acuerdo por medio de la votación de su Mesa Ejecutiva. SCI U deberá de tener el derecho de presentarse ante la Memebresia y la Mesa Directiva de el Local 707 de SEIU.

SEVERABILIDAD

10. En el momento en que cualquier provisión de este acuerdo es hecho invalido por cualquier corte en un juicio final o por un juez arbitrario de persecución de este acuerdo, dichas provisiones hechas ilegalmente deveran de separarse de el resto de este acuerdo y de lo que quede de este acuerdo deberá de permanecer como fuerza completa efectiva.

ARBITRACION

11. Cualquier disputa concerniente a los medios y aplicaciones de los terminos de este acuerdo deberan, bajo requerimiento de cualquier parte, ser referido como una arbitraición final y obligatoria ante un arbitrario mutuamente seleccionado por ambas partes.

SINDICATO INTERNACIONAL DE TRABAJADORES DE SERVICIO, AFL-CIO, Local 707
SINDICATO INDUSTRIAL DEL CONDADO DE SONOMA

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Presidente                  Presidente
Fecha:____________________  Fecha:___________________
Fish plant protesters cry racism

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

Hispanic workers marched in front of Point St. George Fisheries offices at mid-day Monday, denouncing what they called racist working conditions and demanding representation by a union.

The balloon-toting, sign carrying, chanting crowd called on management of the Santa Rosa fish processing plant to hear their demands.

"Have them come out! Have them come out! Have them come out!" the demonstrators yelled as one woman swayed from side to side in front of a window on a weathered wooden bench.

Although no one from Point St. George met with the workers, protest organizers said fish plant employees are determined to join the newly formed Sonoma County Industrial Union representing workers from a Christmas ornament business.

Rally organizers characterized the protest as an effort to win equal rights for Hispanic workers on a par with those of Anglo employees, whose wages and benefits at Point St. George are better than those of Hispanic workers, they charged.

"What exists here is racism," said Alicia Sanchez of the California Human Development Corporation, a protest leader.

Les Amundsen, general manager of the fish plant, said plant workers — be they filleters or packers or whatever — receive the same wages whether they are Hispanic or non-Hispanic.

Charges of discrimination are "nothing deliberate on our part. I would have to sit down with these people and cite various things that are bothering them."

Amundsen said plant officials refused to meet with the chanting crowd on the advice of Point St. George attorneys.

See Protest, back page

Newman Strawbridge leads a union chant at Point St. George fisher.
Protest

Continued from Page A1

“We have to meet in an orderly fashion. They’re screaming and shouting and that’s not the way to do business,” he said.

Newman Strawbridge, a founding member of the Sonoma County Industrial Union and organizer on behalf of fish plant workers, said the march in front of Point St. George was designed to show plant operators there is overwhelming support for union representation among the workers.

Strawbridge said plant officials could have verbally acknowledged the workers’ interest in joining the union, precluding a representation vote that must be authorized by the National Labor Relations Board.

Already, said organizers, about 80 percent of the 200 workers at Point St. George have signed authorization cards indicating interest in union representation cards. These signatures are required for a vote.

Their efforts were supported Monday by representatives from the Teamsters, Sonoma County Organization of Public Employees, a carpenter’s union, churches, Peace and Freedom Party, and the Pledge for Peace in Central America group.

Point St. George workers said they sought union protection as a result of poor working conditions and repeated verbal and physical abuse at the plant.

Plant workers Julieteni Martin del Campo and Francisca Bejar said one woman supervisor hit several workers with a knife sharpener and another supervisor cursed and insulted workers in both English and Spanish.

“He treated us very badly, as if we were slaves,” said Bejar.

Amundsen said he had no knowledge of abusive supervisors. “She wouldn’t be hitting them. She’s part of the crew...They’ve never told me that she’s hit people,” he said.

He said the company, its work load dependent on seasonal highs and lows in the fishing industry, has not used harassment tactics against the workers to undermine unionization attempts. But Sanchez said layoffs have been used to intimidate workers.

Martin del Campo said the plant established a new afternoon shift and hired 20 workers to squash union formation attempts. New workers were given more work than veteran ones, and veteran workers also have been denied water essential to filleting fish, she said.

Amundsen responded that the double shift was instituted to accommodate the large supply of fish, two or three months ago and reduce long hours and work hazards. Water use has been reduced in obedience to Santa Rosa offi-
Fisheries workers vote to join union

Ballot count was 137 to 20

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

Workers at Point St. George Fisheries voted overwhelmingly Friday to be represented by the newly forming Sonoma County Industrial Union — a grass-roots union composed largely of Hispanic workers.

The 137-20 pro-union vote brought to an end three months of mobilization by workers at Point St. George, and means about 300 production workers may have union representation during the fishery's peak season, said union spokesman Newman Strawbridge.

The National Labor Relations Board must certify the election before negotiations between the union and Point St. George management can begin.

Friday, about two dozen workers and supporters broke into repeated chants of "union," as a labor board official counted the votes and announced the results. As the votes were tallied, workers thrust clenched fists into the air, and exchanged bear hugs, hand shakes, and smiles. Tears flowed down the cheeks of some of the women.

"I felt as if my heart was going to jump out when each yes vote was announced," said Susana Garcia, a single mother of seven and filleting fish.

Fishery employees said perennially low wages, cold working conditions, no seniority, and no vacation or medical benefits led them to struggle for union representation the past three months.

They contend that Portuguese employees have a lock on power positions, while other Hispanics are treated in a degrading manner.

"All Latino people had their eyes on us. This will be an inspiration to other Latinos, and a sign that they can better themselves in this county," said Francisca Bejar, a 10-year fish filletter.

Scott Rechtschaffen, an attorney representing Point St. George, declined to comment on the vote.

Les Amundsen, general manager of Point St. George, has said employees are paid standard wages for fishery workers, and denied there is discrimination.

Strawbridge said fishery management tried to intimidate workers by interrogating some, pulling union buttons off others' shirts, and offering two workers better jobs if they spoke out against the union.

Garcia said the company has slashed the work hours of 20 fish filleters and 50 fish packagers. She said she has worked from three to 75 hours a week the last three months, and relied on church and Catholic Charities donations to support her family.

"This had never happened before. We had never gone so long without work. So we think the company did it to make us afraid of joining the union," she said.

Amundsen has said in the past that the need for fishery workers depends on seasonal highs and lows, but workers claim reductions in work hours and layoffs — including that of 65 workers let go a few months ago — have been retaliations against union efforts.

Fishery workers unanimously attributed the pro-union vote to tenacious unity.

"It was more important to win than to suffer hunger pangs," said Bejar. "By winning, I know that we have a union that will truly represent us.

She said union representation offers her hope that she and her husband will be able to support their three children with decent wages, and send them to college.

"For them, it means a better future."

The National Labor Relations Board must certify the election before negotiations between the union and Point St. George management can begin.

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Hispanics flex union muscle

Amnesty spurs county workers to seek rights

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

When 21 Hispanic Christmas-craft workers thrust their arms into the air last February, the landscape of Sonoma County's labor movement was irreversibly changed and painted with a stroke of brown.

Arms raised in an old house converted into a law office marked a historical first in Sonoma County: Hispanic workers banded together to form an independent, grass-roots union.

New immigration law granting legal standing to thousands of illegal workers the past year is the catalyst for union activity by frustrated Latino workers, according to workers and union leaders.

Before those Hispanic employees from Calliope Designs in Santa Rosa voted to form the Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU), most Hispanic workers at the bottom of the county's economic ladder — separated from blue-collar workers by language, culture and the law — labored in non-union jobs.

But immigration reform has brought marches on employers and through the streets of Santa Rosa. On June 17, fishery workers at Point St. George voted overwhelmingly to be represented by the new union.

"It is very beautiful to try to accomplish something that we want, and it is difficult, but with the power of the union, and with the help of people in the community, and other unions, we'll be able to do it," said Pablo Mendoza, a Point St. George worker.

In a separate but similar development, Hispanic farmworkers at Don Mills Mushroom Farms in Geyserville have joined the Teamsters and are negotiating a collective agreement.

Hispanic workers say they're battling for union protection out of a desire to exert some control over their pay, working conditions and benefits — all of them historically inferior to those of white workers.

"It legalized a lot of workers and gave them that incentive in a sense: 'Now I can declare my rights and there's no fear of deportation,'" said Alicia Sanchez, a leader and organizer with the fledgling SCIU.

Gilbert Dorame, an attorney who has processed illegal workers' immigration applications, said Mills was able to keep employees working.

See Labor, Page A10
Continued from Page 4A

or minimum wages year after year with a constant flow of illegal workers, was forced to complain for fear of retaliation.

Dorame said unionizing efforts came to Mills because "the situation was ripe and it sort of dovetailed into the fact a lot of them became legalized.

Immigration counselors say that when the immigration law began offering amnesty to farmworkers who worked a required number of days in the fields, Mills refused to provide workers with proof of their labor.

But Mark Jordan, an attorney for the mushroom farms, said employees requesting pay records through the Teamsters are freely given those records. "Any information that employees have a right to, we are supplying," Jordan said.

At Calliope Designs, co-owner Stephanie Eddy said most Christmas craft workers were legal residents before the amnesty law took effect. She said the amnesty law has had no perceptible impact on the number of job applications Calliope receives from Hispanics.

Les Amundsen, manager of Point St. George, said the unionizing efforts but said amnesty would produce a more stable work force at the fishery.

"It was moving so fast that we'd go through 1,000 just to keep a 300 work force going," he said.

In pre-amnesty days, Point St. George worker Celia Mendoza said employees shied away from union involvement out of fear they would lose their jobs to other illegal residents.

"We were afraid. Not everyone wanted to support us," Mendoza said.

Fishery workers say perennially low wages, cold working conditions, no seniority, vacation or medical benefits have led them to seek union protection. Protesters this spring said they were paid $5 to $10 or $12 an hour on a per-pound basis, working only two or three days a week on an on-call basis.

Workers tell stories of longtime employees now suffering from arthritis because of long hours handling icy fish.

And they said Portuguese employees have a lock on power positions.

Amundsen of Point St. George denied that Portuguese employees receive preferential treatment and said the Portuguese man who runs the plant holds the position because he speaks English, Spanish and Portuguese.

"They're all doing the same jobs throughout the plant," Amundsen said. He said PL St. George workers are paid "industry standards."

"I think it's time to put a stop to the way the owner has taken advantage of us. No more exploitation of Latinos," said Francisca Bejar, a nine-year Point St. George employee who claims she's never received a paid vacation.

The new union many fishery employees hope to join was formed with full support of other local unions.

"It will lift that floor, so to speak, of those minimal standards, and it will give people a sense of hope that you can work in this society with dignity and respect without regard to the color of your skin or what sex, or what language you speak," said Paul Kaplan of the Sonoma County Organization of Public and Private Employees (SCOPPE).

Although the SCIU has been bolstered by support from established unions, the older unions in turn look to the enthusiastic, democratic industrial union as an idealistic model for unions in the 1980s. SCIU represents about 30 workers at Calliope Designs, and if the National Labor Relations Board certifies the recent election at Point St. George, the union may end up representing 300 fishery workers.

"Brown workers have gone out forward in a circumstance that other people were saying they cannot succeed and they're succeeding, and other unions are looking on as an example," said Newman Strawbridge, a member of the Labor Law Enforcement Center and founding member of SCIU.

The pro-union struggle can be attributed to an increasing number of Hispanic families with deeper roots in the community than 15 years ago. And the bishop said society is inclined to support the Hispanic labor struggle as an outgrowth of the 1960s civil rights movement.

Each week, SCIU members and prospective members discuss issues in a forum designed so everyone can express an opinion during lengthy talks.

At a recent meeting, Point St. George workers rallied over the dilemma of a longtime worker, who had been offered a promotion to foreman -- a position that would separate her from any union to be joined.

"We have built a feeling and an organization that somebody doesn't want to leave, not even for a promotion. This grows. This is the spirit, this is what grows," said Strawbridge.

The union enthusiasm ended the meeting with hands clasped in a prayer of gratitude and hope.

Nearly all of the union's members are Mexican. Members of SCIU are bound together by extended family connections and most of the union members are women, Strawbridge said.

Recently, SCOPPE's international affiliate, Service Employees International Union, approved a resolution calling for support of Hispanic workers seeking to better themselves.

The independent union also has received contributions from Catholic churches in Windsor and Santa Rosa, plus donations from carpenters, bus drivers and letter carriers. About 60 out-of-work fishery workers have benefited from donations of food and money.

"Established union people have provided translation services," helped mop floors after meetings, made phone calls and supported pro-union Hispanic workers at rallies. In turn, large SCIU contingents have attended the Martin Luther King peace and justice march and demonstrations on behalf of bus drivers before the Board of Supervisors.

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Calliope Design workers picket the Tesconi Circle firm Wednesday

**New union pickets crafts firm**

*By Alvaro Delgado*

Members of the newly formed Sonoma County Industrial Union struck a Christmas craft business Wednesday and vowed to stay off the job until a contract is signed.

About 20 Calliope Designs employees picketed in front and back of the business off Tesconi Circle from 6:30 a.m. to about 4 p.m.

The pickets appeared after the company canceled a negotiation session the night before.

Dorr and Stephanie Eddy, owners of Calliope, said late Wednesday morning they were surprised by the strike, following several weeks of negotiations. The workers voted to form their own union — composed mostly of Hispanic workers — in March.

"We're very surprised. No one has said anything to us about a strike or a reason to strike," said Stephanie Eddy.

Stephanie Eddy said Calliope, which makes some 700 different products, most of them Christmas dough ornaments, will continue filling orders during the strike.

"If we have to hire replacements, then we'll have to hire replacements," she said.

Members of the fledgling union also picketed in front of Point St. George Fisheries on Wednesday to call attention to the fishery's refusal to recognize SCIU as the bargaining unit for fishery workers.

Point St. George employees voted 137 to 20 to be represented by the grass-roots union on June 17. The fishery has questioned the legitimacy of the election by filing 60 objections with the National Labor Relations Board.

Calliope Design workers said their strike was prompted by management's refusal to bargain in good faith and treat Hispanic workers respectfully.

"Simply speaking, they just don't take us seriously. They think that what we want will never be accomplished and what they'd like to do is break the union," said Holanda Araya, a Calliope worker.

Both management and union members accused each other of canceling negotiating sessions in the past. Although management canceled the last session, Stephanie Eddy said the SCIU called off five of nine meetings before that.

The Eddys, who have operated the business for 16 years, said they are inexperienced in dealing with labor struggles but respect the SCIU and take it seriously. Whenever a productivity issue arises at Calliope, where production workers are paid a piece rate, union representatives are consulted, they said.

"We wish that this had never happened. We wish that everybody was working," said Dorr Eddy.

See Strike, Page 21
Strike

Continued from Page B1

SCIU members said they were angered by the layoff of two workers without regard for seniority, and filed an unfair labor practice complaint with the NLRA.

Newman Strawbridge, member of the Labor Law Enforcement Center and an SCIU leader, charged that management recruited several past workers to work at Calliope in an attempt to undermine the union.

"As far as asking any old workers to come back to work that's a total fabrication," said Stephanie Eddy.

There is a discrepancy between what workers claim they are paid and what Calliope's owners say they make. Workers say they make less for their highly skilled work than others with comparable job skills, and claim there are 10-year workers at Calliope making only $6 an hour with no benefits.

But Stephanie Eddy said workers' wages range from $6 to $12 an hour; for both employees paid on a piece rate and those paid hourly wages. She said workers receive medical benefits, six days of vacation a year, and at least four paid holidays.

If and when a contract is signed with Calliope, SCIU would represent 35 workers.

Elena Pulido, a 10-year Calliope veteran of the production department, disputed Eddy's claim that workers make up to $12 an hour.

Adolfin Hernandez, a two-year worker who said she makes $4.60 an hour in the shipping department, said she earned an average of $4.60 hourly last year while working for six months on a piece rate in production.

Hernandez said workers want improved benefits: Medical coverage for families, and eye and dental benefits, in addition to vacation pay higher than $3 an hour.

Strawbridge said Calliope workers are underpaid because they're Hispanic, but the Eddys said people from different ethnic groups— from Samoans to Asians to Anglos to Hispanics—have worked at Calliope and received the same pay.

"What bothers us is making it a racial issue when it isn't one at all," said Lee Ferro, Calliope's bookkeeper.

Across town at Point St. George Fisheries, Strawbridge charged that the fishery filed "trivial" objections to the union election to delay serious negotiations. The fishery falsely claimed that 18-year workers intimidated fellow employees into voting for the SCIU.

"It's simply a paper game to delay the impact of the election," he said.

Scott Rechtschaffen, an attorney for Point St. George, refused to comment on the nature of the NLRB complaints but expressed confidence they will be found to be legitimate.

"We just don't believe in a war of words in the newspaper," he said.
Companies are recruiting replacements

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

Mexico workers at a Geyserville mushroom farm and a Santa Rosa Christmas craft business vowed to continue their strikes Monday as employers continued to recruit replacement workers at both businesses.

Picketing workers at Calliope Designs said owners of the Christmas craft shop are wasting their money on replacement workers who are too inexperienced to make dough ornaments requiring much patience and skill.

Workers on the Calliope picket line said the company brought in seven workers on Monday to help replace the 20 employees who have been on strike since July 13. Lee Ferro, bookkeeper for Calliope, acknowledged that "several" temporary workers had been hired.

The strikers are members of the (Nudging Sonoma County Industrial Union--La grasa roots union of Hispanic workers founded this spring. The workers have vowed to stay off the job until an acceptable contract is negotiated with Calliope.

Workers said they were dissatisfied with a Calliope offer made last week that would have granted employees an hourly wage increase of 15 cents during a three-year contract. Fringe benefits offered also were unacceptable, they said.

Owners Stephanie and Don Eddy were out of town on business and unavailable for comment on the offer. Ferro refused to speak about the proposal but said a negotiating session is scheduled Aug. 8.

Calliope's striking production workers are paid either a piece rate for ornaments produced, or an hourly wage. Owners of the firm said workers on the piece rate average between $6 and $12 hourly, a figure disputed by strikers. Those on hourly wages receive less than $6 an hour.

"We're more determined than we were when we first went on strike. We're even angrier," said
Strikers want worker rehired

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

Workers on strike against a Christmas craft business the past five weeks are demanding the company reinstate an employee fired last week for allegedly striking a security guard.

Calliope Designs management has charged that a female employee struck the security guard with the handle of a picket sign, but a representative of the workers' union said the woman never hit the guard.

"There was no physical touching of any kind," said Neil Herring, attorney for the Sonoma County Industrial Union.

Mike Merril, attorney for Calliope, said the incident was an outgrowth of "abusive conduct" on the picket line by strikers against replacement workers. Police were called to the picket line Thursday and the woman was arrested.

Security guard hit, firm claims

Merrill downplayed the effect the woman's firing will have on negotiations with the union, but Herring said the union wants the employee reinstalled before any settlement is reached in the long strike.

"That's added a major issue to the strike. There's no way we're going back without having her reinstated," said Herring.

Merrill spoke optimistically of three sessions the past month between Calliope and union representatives. A fourth session is scheduled Monday.

But Herring said management has failed to offer the employees a package with adequate wage, medical, vacation, union security and seniority provisions.

Most of the strikers are paid a piece rate per ornament produced and owners of the firm say workers on a piece rate average between $6 and $12 hourly, a figure disputed by strikers.

"We've been on strike for five weeks and we haven't been offered 10 cents. They've offered peanuts," said Herring.

Merrill refused to discuss money details, but said Calliope is trying to devise a new piece rate formula with less fluctuations in the amount paid for a variety of Christmas ornaments.

Calliope workers said their strike was prompted by reductions in piece rates of certain ornaments and management's refusal to treat Hispanic workers respectfully. The union, which consists largely of Hispanic workers, was born at Calliope early this year. In March, Point St. George Fisheries workers voted overwhelmingly to join the union.
SANTA ROSA (AP) —

Hearing on Point St. George union

The National Labor Relations Board began a hearing Monday to consider objections filed by Point St. George Fisheries against an overwhelming vote by fishery workers last June to join the Sonoma County Industrial Union.

After the fishery workers voted 137-20 for the SCIU as its collective bargaining unit, the fishery filed 60 objections to contest the legitimacy of the election.

The fishery dropped 10 of the objections before the public hearing began Monday at the Flamingo Hotel. The sessions are expected to continue Wednesday and Thursday.

Among the company's claims are that Portuguese-speaking employees were not given proper instructions in their native language during the election, that union supporters threatened to report Mexican employees to the Immigration and Naturalization Service if they did not vote pro-union and that workers were intimidated into wearing union buttons.

Newman Strawbridge, a member of the SCIU and the Labor Law Enforcement Center, said the company's charges are false and were filed to "subvert" workers' support for the union, formed earlier this year by mostly Hispanic workers.
Workers who struck a Christmas craft business three months ago have returned to their jobs without a contract, ending a walkout by members of a grassroots union consisting largely of Mexican women.

The employees — members of the Sonoma County Industrial Union — went back to work after management at Caliope Designs made a last offer three weeks ago.

Negotiations had reached an impasse that could not be resolved with help from a federal mediator. "We came back in order to save our union. The owner grabbed us and squeezed us," said Sara Ochoa, one of 20 strikers to go back to work.

Mike Merrill, attorney for Calliope, said workers were offered a comprehensive package that provides equitable compensation for production of a variety of Christmas ornaments produced at Caliope. Most workers are paid on a piece-rate basis.

Union representatives maintain the company's last offer reduced piece rates for the most popular crafts. But Merril said the union focused unduly on a few ornaments at the expense of the total package.

Merrill said the workers will work under the pay and benefit provisions of the last offer, even though the union refused to accept the proposal.

He said seven of 20 replacement workers hired on a temporary basis by Calliope will be retained to handle the company's growing workload.

Neil Herring, attorney for the union, said workers realized the replacement workers would carry Caliope through the Christmas business crunch.

"The handwriting (was) on the wall. If we sat out, we were not going to get any better offer. The union can't win anything from the outside," said Herring. "We can strike against them anytime we
A challenge for the fledgling union breaking
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Although some 150 Point

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Workers say SR fishery flouts laws on equipment

Firm makes them pay for required gear

By ALVARO BELGADO
Staff Writer

Workers at Point St. George Fisheries filed a class action complaint in Sonoma County Superior Court on Monday claiming the fishery has flouted government laws by charging workers the cost of required gear.

The complaint states that 200 or more workers have been illegally charged for protective gloves, aprons and boots required for work at the Sebastopol Road fishery.

Nell Herring, one of two attorneys representing the fishery workers, said state and federal regulations require employers to furnish employees the equipment needed to ensure a safe working environment.

But attorneys for Point St. George contend that aprons, gloves and boots do not qualify as "protective equipment" under federal and state laws.

General manager Les Amundsen said the company offers the gear at cost to workers who wish to wear the apparel. The practice is common in the seafood industry, he said.

"Everybody does exactly what we've been doing," Amundsen said. "It's up to the attorneys to decide what's legal."

The complaint, follows an overwhelming vote last June by fishery workers to join the fledgling Sonoma County Industrial Union, a union of mostly Hispanic workers.

But Point St. George challenged the validity of the election before a hearing officer of the National Labor Relations Board in August, and a decision is expected soon.

Fishery workers say their handling, filleting and packing of fish forces them to work in cold, wet conditions that require protective clothes.

"We have no choice. It's very necessary to use that work gear or we'll get all wet and pricked by fish bones," said Celia Mendoza, a 21-year fishery worker.

The Superior Court complaint asks that workers be reimbursed, with interest, for money deducted from paychecks the past three years to pay for protective gear.

Herring said about 200 workers are employed at the fishery at any given time, but a total of 300 past and present workers may eventually be included in the legal action.

The complaint asks for $200 per worker for each of the past three years, a figure Herring said is a rough guess. Reimbursement is only sought for the past three years because of a statute of limitations.

The employees also ask for $1,000 in punitive damages per worker, reimbursement of attorney and litigation fees, and an

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who fillet fish, but those workers must purchase all other gear like the rest of the workers. The women must also buy their own knife sharpeners.

Aprons are priced at $13 or $3, depending on quality, boots are about $15, and gloves cost from $1.35 to $2 per pair, said Herring.

Herring said a small number of men who do heavy butchering work must buy their own knives at $6 each and sharpeners for $15 to $18 each.

Mendoza said all the workers are applying for legal status through a new immigration law and are therefore more confident of challenging the fishery. Workers’ wages range from $4.25 hourly to $8 or $10 an hour for those working on piece rates. But wages on the upper end of the scale fluctuate with the type of fish in season.

“Only because the workers are low paid and maybe not documented that the company would take advantage of them this way,” said Herring, referring to past undocumented workers at the fishery.

Amundsen said the practice of charging for gear is not exploitation of those with marginal legal status, but rather adoption of a practice prevalent at fisheries.

Herring has represented the union in negotiations on behalf of a group of Christmas craft workers. In the class action complaint, workers are also being represented by the California Rural Legal Assistance.
Bargaining agent status recommended

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

A National Labor Relations Board hearing officer is recommending the Sonoma County Industrial Union be certified as a legal bargaining agent for some 300 workers at Point St. George Fisheries in Santa Rosa.

Hearing officer Barbara D. Davison made that recommendation to the full labor board after rejecting 50 objections Point St. George raised against a successful union organizing election by the SCIU. Davison, an officer in the NLRB's office in Oakland, issued her 72-page decision last week following 12 days of hearings in Santa Rosa in August and September.

The decision is a major victory for the Sonoma County union, formed only last January and which began an organizing drive at the Point St. George facility in Santa Rosa in March.

"It means they can't steal the election from us. We're not going to have a rerun election based on these groundless objections. That's the important thing," said Neil M. Herring, attorney for the SCIU.

Neither Les Amundsen, general manager of the fishery, nor attorneys for Point St. George could be reached for comment Monday.

The company has the option of appealing the decision to the five-member National Labor Relations Board in Washington, D.C., a process that could take months.

A decision in favor of the SCIU would mean the union would represent Point St. George workers in negotiations for a labor contract, said Herring.

Point St. George workers voted 137-38 in June to have the grassroots SCIU represent them.

The company challenged the election, filing some 50 objections to the organizing drive, the balloting procedure, and conduct of the union.

In a long list of complaints to labor officials, the company claimed Portuguese-speaking employees were not properly instructed in their native language during the election, that workers were intimidated into wearing union buttons, and that the union tried to inflame racial prejudices.

Nearly all of Point St. George's workers are Mexican. Most of them are women.

SCIU representatives called the charges "trivial" and a concerted attempt to prevent management from having to bargain with the SCIU.

Point St. George withdrew 10 of the objections before a public hearing on them began in August.

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The employer failed to convince Davison of any of its claims.

"I find that the employer has failed to meet its burden of proof in supporting the allegations," Davison said at the conclusion of her report to the labor board.

The hearing officer's report recounts the testimony of a white worker at the plant on Sebastopol Road. The worker, not eligible to vote on the union issue, testified that during the course of the election campaign, pro-union workers made statements that "gringos" would be fired and that if the union election failed "we'll slash the gringos' tires."

But the witness failed to convince Davison that racism and intimidation played a role in the campaign.

In fact, she suggested the employee either failed to tell the truth or was stretching the truth.

"He admitted under cross examination ... that his testimony ... made no sense. I agree and find that his testimony concerning these events was either totally fabricated or embellished in an attempt to support the employer's objections," said Davison.

Herring said the expects the full NLRB to sustain the regional hearing officer's decision.

Davison's decision is an important victory for the young union, which is attempting to find its place among organized labor in the area. The union has yet to negotiate a contract.

Earlier this year, the union led a nearly three-month strike against Callopin Designs, a Christmas crafts business. The 35 striking workers gave up the strike and returned to work in late September rather than lose their jobs.

Callopin workers — most of them Hispanic women — joined the SCIU last February.
Fight continues

Life's work began on Southern streets for activist Newman Strawbridge

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

As a teenager, Newman Strawbridge was a proud member of the "West End Yacht Club," a bicycle club in Tuscaloosa, Ala. that did things much less innocent than its name.

Strawbridge and his fellow gang members regularly fought the blacks in the West End area, a neighborhood where black and white alike were poor. One avenue - 38th Street - divided the whites and blacks, and a cross-over was a ticket to a fight.

But one day, Southern Christian Leadership Conference workers piqued Strawbridge's curiosity with a voter registration foray into West End.

Strawbridge perused SCLC's newspaper the Southern Courier, and came away impressed with its message that neither whites nor blacks would prosper at the local paper mill unless they stopped fighting each other.

Three days after visiting the SCLC's office, Strawbridge went to work for the organization in the civil rights movement at age 17. He was thrown out of his gang, and his mother's home became the target of racial epithets.

The blue-eyed teenager ended up risking his life at the hands of racist Southerners. But he also saw the revered Martin Luther King Jr. in action, marshaling his troops in organizational meetings.

"He had kind of an iron gentleness about him. He was fast in his work, but he was never insulting. You knew when he left that you were going to succeed in that county. (And) you knew you were going to be hurt," said Strawbridge.

King reinforced the message of color-blind worker solidarity, a message Strawbridge has embraced in his activity with the nearly-all Hispanic Sonoma County Industrial Union. The union has garnered widespread community support and purports to fight for the rights of all workers.

"I guarantee if we succeed in what we're doing, it will be a victory for the community," Strawbridge said.

Newman Strawbridge leads a chant during a labor protest at the Point Saint George Fishery in April, 1988

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Strawbridge knows his union faces an uphill struggle, as certainly as 1960s civil rights workers faced Ku Klux Klan resistance in the Deep South. He worked with the SCLC for half a dozen years, helping organize blacks in the "Black Belt" — a stretch of land from Louisiana to Alabama.

Apart from participation in the civil rights movement, Strawbridge has been a minister, practiced civil rights law, and rubbed shoulders with Cesar Chavez as a California Agricultural Labor Relations Board investigator. He now works as a private labor investigator.

His 1960s memories are vivid. He remembers the time he and two other civil rights supporters were covered by sheets, tied up, thrown in the back of a truck and driven into the woods near Utah, Ala., by the Klan. Strawbridge shook with fear on the ground and wet his pants.

"We knew we were dead. It took days to get over that because they had just killed three people," he said.

During the course of his civil rights work, he was jailed 30 or 40 times, hit by dogs, knocked down by water hoses, and beaten more than once. He learned to never walk alone, and to steer clear of police dogs and Klansmen.

As a result of his civil rights work, Gov. George Wallace's "thugs" — apparently state policemen — would visit his mother about every year and warn her Strawbridge would end up in prison for violating the law.

Initially, the family surrounded her with uncles for protection, but his mother later shed her fear and argued Strawbridge's position with Wallace's agents.

Strawbridge remembers watching Wallace as he tried to keep blacks from entering the University of Alabama, in a standoff with federal officials seeking to usher blacks into the Tuscaloosa school.

"The West End blew up that night. I got beat up and thrown into a motel swimming pool," he recalls.

"I grew up with lynchings. As kids we'd go to the side of the streets to watch that," he said.

Once every couple of months during his childhood, a black man would be castrated, and the carving of KKK initials on black stomachs were common. In spite of the racist environment in which he grew up, Strawbridge and his siblings were slapped by their mother if they said anything racist.

Strawbridge considers himself lucky that the SCLC, under King's direction, decided to pay a visit to the West End of Tuscaloosa during his teen years. The experience changed his life.

"I feel blessed. It was handed to me on a silver platter," he said.
On the night before Martin Luther King's birthday last year, workers from a Christmas crafts shop huddled to vent their disenchantment with wages and working conditions.

Their strength grew as they talked of the martyred civil rights leader's sacrifices. The very next day — on King's birthday — they protested their displeasure by failing to show up for work at Calliope Designs.

"We thought it was the moment and the day we should do it. I think King's life gave us confidence, courage and greater unity. He struggled and struggled until he..."

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Union

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gave his own life. 'We thought: “What's the fear?”' recalled Adolfo
Hernandez, a Calliope Designs employee.

Those same workers soon became the nucleus for the Sonoma
County Industrial Union, a union of nearly all Hispanic members rep-
resenting workers at Calliope and Point St. George Fisheries.

The union has yet to negotiate a contract for its workers, but in a
year's time has organized rallies, marches, and a three-month strike
with the same tenacity that marked the sit-ins, marches and boycotts of
the 1960s civil rights struggle led by King.

"I've seen them build organiza-
tions that are almost identical and
I've seen them struggle for others
in exactly the same way. You don't
organize the similarities. They oc-
cur because of the similarities," said Strawbridge, an
SCIU organizer and veteran of the civil rights movement.

SCIU leaders say they're carry-
ing the civil rights torch where
King was beginning to carry it
shortly before his death: From the
courthouse to the workplace.

Strawbridge said the union rep-resents 380 Calliope and fishery
workers and counts 50 to 60 active
supporters.

SCIU members and supporters
say the bottom rung of the job
ladder in farmworker, light manu-
facturing, food processing, elec-
tronics, and other jobs in Sonoma
County is occupied nearly exclu-
sively by Hispanic workers.

"It's a problem of an exploitative
system. The reason Latino workers

can be exploited is because their
position here is more tenuous," said Neil Herring, attorney for the
SCIU.

In their quest to eliminate what
they say is abuse of poor Hispanics,
SCIU members have used tactics
similar to those employed in the
Deep South two decades ago.

While civil rights protesters of
the 1960s risked Ku Klux Klan
beatings and lynchings, fire,hoses,
and police beatings, members of the
new union say they're willing to
risk their jobs for their cause.

"Martin Luther King gave his life
for us, so we have to give up our
lives for our co-worker. If we lose
our jobs, well, it doesn't matter," said Susana Garcia, a worker at
Point St. George Fisheries.

In the same way that the civil
rights movement drew widespread
support from churches, northern
whites, and some politicians, the
SCIU movement has forged a broad
base of support among churches,
predominantly white union,
"peace and justice" activists, pro-
gressives, and leftists.

Herring noted SCIU members
make all major decisions in a
democratic way, paralleling the
"mass" democratic meetings of the
civil rights era. "That's why there's
no fear of so-called Communists.
We have no secrets. Anybody can
join us," he said.

Prior to civil rights sit-ins, Straw-
bridge remembered a preacher
would commend the protesters'
safety to God. Similarly, SCIU
members hold hands and pray for
strength and wisdom before union
activity.

In the union's sparse but brightly
decorated quarters at the Corby
Avenue labor center, it is not
unusual to see an open Bible with
passages marked in yellow.

"I've never
in my life
even people
who
depth in God. It's
inspiring. When
people are praying. Where they go
for strength is prayer,"

While black churches formed the
backbone of the black civil rights
movement, the SCIU's movement
has been backed by Catholic, Unit-
ed Methodist, Unitarian, Lutheran
and Quaker churches.

SCIU volunteer Rick Costner
said union members have adopted
the popular De Colores song as a
sort of anthem, in the same way
that civil rights workers drew
inspiration from We Shall Over-
come.

SCIU members and supporters
foresee activity resembling even
more closely the tactics of the
1960s movement: Sit-ins to keep
strike-breakers from crossing pick-
et lines and possible picketing at
employers' homes.

"Our fight is never-ending. We
understand that we're going to
have to fight for years and years.
Every member is prepared for it," said Strawbridge.

In an effort to prepare workers
for the long struggle, SCIU mem-
bers learn about King's concepts of
non-violence, labor history, and in
a few cases, to read and write.

Strawbridge said SCIU embraces
the whole person, as did the
Southern Christian Leadership
Conference in teaching literacy use
of bank accounts to blacks.

While the mothers and fa-
thers of southern black activists
were beat up, Strawbridge has seen
mothers of SCIU members "who
are a little bit worried go from
worried to being proud."
Union blend joins Anglos, Hispanics

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

A union made up almost entirely of Hispanic industrial workers has decided to affiliate with county government's largest union, the Sonoma County Organization of Public and Private Employees.

The merger brings under one umbrella the Sonoma County Industrial Union and SCOPE, a predominantly Anglo union representing some 3,400 county and other workers.

"It's like a mini-integration project," said Michael Allen, manager of SCOPE Local 707.

SCIU decided almost unanimously to align its fledgling, grass-roots union with SCOPE. More than 80 workers favored the affiliation and only two opposed it in a recent vote.

Members of the industrial union say affiliation with SCOPE will strengthen their union formed a little over a year ago. SCOPE is part of the Service Employees International Union, which represents 900,000 workers across the country.

"The union will become stronger, more easily recognized, and most importantly, the affiliation unites us as brothers and sisters with the members of SCOPE," said Sara Ochoa, an SCIU member.

SCIU represents workers at Calliope Designs, a Christmas craft shop in Santa Rosa, and Point St. George Fisheries. Many of the workers are women and virtually all are Hispanic.

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SCOPE’s membership includes county employees, as well as a variety of maintenance and non-teaching employees from Santa Rosa Junior College, and Cotati and Rohnert Park schools.

Nell Herring, attorney for SCIU, said SCIU members will have available to them the health and dental insurance plans offered to SCOPE members. The affiliation also means SCIU will receive money for paid staffers.

SCIU members say the merger will not erode SCIU’s identity as a union of tenacious workers responsible for bolsterous rallies, marches and a three-month-strike against Calliope.

Herring said SCIU will operate as an independent division of SCOPE with its own board and leadership. The union will remain steadfast in its commitment to organizing Hispanic workers.

SCIU volunteer Rick Coshnear said the alliance with SCOPE will give SCIU added clout in boycotts and strikes the feisty union may decide to launch.

“It’s like a mutual aid pact. We’re going to help them in their struggles and they’re going to help us in our struggles,” said Allen.

In its short existence, SCIU has figured prominently in its support of county transit workers and public demonstrations organized by “peace and justice” groups.

The SCIU movement has forged a broad base of support among churches, predominantly Anglo unions and political liberals.

Allen said the integration of the unions paves the way for integration of ethnically diverse groups on social and cultural planes.
Union certified for Point St. George Fisheries

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

Rejecting an appeal from Point St. George Fisheries, the National Labor Relations Board in Washington, D.C. has certified the Sonoma County Industrial Union as the bargaining agent for the Santa Rosa fish processor's workers.

The ruling in favor of the SCIU comes a year after Point St. George workers voted overwhelmingly to have the grass-roots union represent them at Point St. George.

Company workers voted 137-20 in favor of representation from SCIU, a union of virtually all Hispanic workers. Nearly all of Point St. George's workers are Mexican and most are women.

"We're extremely happy. We won. They have to accept the fact that we won. We'll keep fighting," said Carmen Sanchez, a Point St. George worker.

In December, an NLRB hearing officer rejected objections to a June election by company management and recommended the union be certified as the legal bargaining agent for Point St. George workers.

Point St. George appealed that decision to the NLRB in Washington, D.C. and the board handed down its decision last week. Newman Strawbridge, a "SCIU organizer, said the union received word of the ruling Monday.

"I'm sure we're going to request a hearing. What it means for the union is we simply won another moral victory," said Strawbridge.

The company initially filed 50 objections to the union's organizing drive, the ballots procedure and conduct of the union. It withdrew 10 of the objections before a public hearing on the objections began in August.

The SCIU said all along the objections were a "frivolous" attempt to stall the establishment of a union at the Sebastopol Road fish processing operation. "All of the objections were thrown out," said Strawbridge.

Neither Les Admandsen, general manager of the company, nor Point St. George attorney could be reached for comment Tuesday.

Strawbridge said Point St. George must either bargain with the union or challenge the NLRB ruling in federal court.

Certification of the union coincides with the layoff last week of 27 men who drive trucks and work on machines at the fish processing company. Strawbridge said the company attributed the layoffs to lack of work.

Sanchez said about 50 women filleters and packers, working on an as-needed basis, have worked very little since the start of the year and even less the last couple of months.

She and fellow worker Cella Mendosa said there shouldn't be a scarcity of work during the current salmon season.

"They're sending the fish somewhere else because they don't want to call the people to work," charged Sanchez.

The union also must contend with the firing of three union activists and will file unfair labor practice charges against Point St. George as a result of the firings.

Although SCIU has yet to reach the negotiating table with company management, Strawbridge credits the union's presence for small wage increases and a health insurance package given to workers.

But he said most of the women don't qualify for health insurance because of the few hours they work. Union members and supporters will hold a "vigil" in a bid for better insurance this morning in front of the firm.
SR fishery mulls appeal of NLRB decision on union

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

Point St. George Fisheries in Santa Rosa is considering appealing a National Labor Relations Board decision that certifies the Sonoma County Industrial Union as the bargaining agent for fishery workers.

Rob Carroll, an attorney for Point St. George, said the company may file an appeal with the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on the basis of union payments of $500 to $700 in rent for six to eight workers who had been laid off.

He called the payments a very serious breach of the law. The union actually paid the rent. There is ample legal basis for an appeal.

Alicia Sanchez, an organizer for SCIU, said Point St. George's objection to the rent payments was not one of 60 original objections filed by the company to a June 1988 union election.

She said the objection was a "supplemental" one filed from notes and records the union provided the company. She said workers collected money from churches, unions and individuals to pay employees' rent.

She said the NLRB ruled the payments were of a charitable and spontaneous nature and not designed to buy union votes.

"We were trying to help our compañeros, our brothers and sisters in the struggle. It never occurred to us that this was going to be objected to," Sanchez said.

The NLRB in Washington, D.C., ruled in favor of the union last week, rejecting an appeal from Point St. George. The fishery had appealed a hearing officer's rejection last December of objections to the June election.

Carroll said acceptance by the labor board of union money for workers' rent "radically departs from the previously decided case law." He said the company will decide next week whether to appeal.
Protesters stage sit-in at fish plant

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

Two Sonoma County Industrial Union representatives staged a sit-in inside Point St. George Fisheries on Wednesday, demanding that fishery management provide more hours for longtime workers and re-hire three laid-off workers.

Bob Harrington of Point St. George Fisheries denounced the sit-in and expressed outrage that chanting union supporters, joined by workers, stormed into the plant and demanded that their demands be heard by him.

Union organizer Alicia Sanchez and union volunteer Pat Ruchalski sat down inside the fishery's work area to protest what they said is management's refusal to rehire three laid-off workers because they're union activists.

Sanchez and Ruchalski were also protesting what they said is Point St. George's failure to provide enough hours for longtime female workers to qualify them for health benefits. Santa Rosa Police officers responded to the scene but decided not to arrest the pair.

Harrington refused to meet with Sanchez and said later that the labor issues raised by the two women are better addressed across a negotiating table.

"When she gets fired up like that, you really can't converse with her," said Harrington. "It's a non-win situation when you have millions of people yelling at you. It's sensationalism on their part."

Ruchalski, formerly a driver with Sonoma County Transit and an activist with the union representing its workers, was taken to the county's Oakcrest mental facility in July 1988 after driving a bus onto the front lawn of the county administration center.

The sit-in was preceded by a noon rally in front of the fishery's Sebastopol Road entrance that was attended by dozens of workers and their supporters holding signs with messages such as "Justice for Women Workers" in English and "The People Will Triumph" in Spanish.

Point St. George workers voted overwhelmingly to join the Sonoma County Industrial Union in June 1988 but the union has yet to sign a contract with the fishery following months of negotiations.

Sanchez said the sit-in resulted from management's reluctance to move fast enough on the issues of the three laid-off workers and hours for longtime women workers. Upon entering the plant, she urged workers to continue working to avoid trouble with management.

"I need to get arrested so that the community understands the seriousness of the problem that we have here," she told workers in Spanish when she entered the plant.
Union OKs contract with Point St. George

By ALVARO DELGADO
Staff Writer

A 3-year-old Sonoma County labor union whose membership is nearly all Hispanic has reached a tentative agreement with Point St. George Fisheries, a company confronted with many past labor grievance and demonstrations.

Union organizers say the agreement is a milestone for a union that traces its origins to the walkout at a Christmas ornament business in Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday three years ago.

"This gives us more security at work. We won. We won a lot," said Celvis Meandra, a 22-year worker at Point St. George. "I feel happy for the others who are just starting, because who knows how many more years I'll work."

Bob Harrington of Point St. George said key issues have been hammered out with the Sonoma County Industrial Union, getting the stage for a formal contract signing within a week.

"Everything looks real good. We have our hopes that all of this stuff will be done soon," Harrington said. "It's going to be a good contract.

Harrington and union representatives said the three-year contract gives workers the choice of joining or staying out of the union and grants minimal raises.

The fishery's work force fluctuates greatly depending on the season and availability of fish. Harrington said about 120 people are working at Point St. George.

Both Harrington and union members emphasized the contract begins a new era of positive relations between management and workers, marked in the past by acrimony, name-calling and charges of discrimination by Hispanic workers.

Harrington said the agreement calls for paid holidays, paid vacation and health insurance—benefits available to workers the past three years or so.

"I think the biggest win for us is that it's the first contract for this company," said Alicia Sanchez, an organizer with the union.

Mendoza said attempts by workers to unionize dating back to 1985 failed. But workers succeeded in 1988 with motivation from Sanchez, community support and an amnesty program that extended legal status to many workers.

Fishery workers voted overwhelmingly in favor of the contract.