

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
U.S. Labor and Working-Class History

VOLUME 2
G-N
INDEX

Eric Arnesen
EDITOR

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
New York London

Routledge is an imprint of the
Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
270 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
2 Park Square
Milton Park, Abingdon
Oxon OX14 4RN

© 2007 by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
Routledge is an imprint of Taylor & Francis Group, an Informa business

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

International Standard Book Number-10: 0-415-96826-7 (Hardcover)
International Standard Book Number-13: 978-0-415-96826-3 (Hardcover)

No part of this book may be reprinted, reproduced, transmitted, or utilized in any form by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, microfilming, and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publishers.

Trademark Notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Arnesen, Eric.
Encyclopedia of U.S. labor and working-class history / Eric Arnesen.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-415-96826-7
1. Labor--United States--History--Encyclopedias. 2. Working class--United States--History--Encyclopedias. 3. Industrial relations--United States--History--Encyclopedias. I. Title. II. Title: Encyclopedia of United States labor and working-class history.

HD8066.A78 2006
331.0973'03--dc22

2006048640

Visit the Taylor & Francis Web site at
<http://www.taylorandfrancis.com>

and the Routledge Web site at
<http://www.routledge-ny.com>

between 20% and 30% of Manhattan's entire white male workforce--prompting the *Evening Post* to ponder such implications.

The birth of the city's trades union thus dates from the journeymen house carpenters strike of 1833. That strike not only became the nucleus around which the GTU was formed, but further, notes the historian Edward Pessen, the cornerstone upon which the early labor movement was based.

TIMOTHY C. COOGAN

References and Further Reading

- Brown, James D. Jr. "A Curriculum of United States Labor History for Teachers." Sponsored by the Illinois Labor History Society.
- Commons, John R., et al. *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*. Vol. V. Cleveland, OH: Arthur H. Clark, 1910.
- . *History of Labour in the United States*. Vol. I. New York: Macmillan, 1918.
- Constitution and Bye-Laws*. New York Union Society of Journeymen House Carpenters. Manuscript, New York Public Library.
- Finch, John R. *Rise and Progress of the General Trades' Union in the City of New York and Its Vicinity*. New York: James Ormond, 1833.
- Hugins, Walter E. *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement, 1829-1837*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960.
- Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer*, June 3, 10, 1833.
- National Trades' Union*, August 9, and December 12, 1834.
- Pessen, Edward. *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1967.
- Wilentz, Sean. *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

JUSTICE FOR JANITORS

"*Si se puede!*" "Yes, we can!" janitors chanted on picket lines in cities across the United States, rattling noisemakers made from soda cans and stones. Justice for Janitors, a national campaign launched by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in 1987, combined street theater and civil disobedience with legal and corporate strategies to organize the janitorial industry. Justice for Janitor's astonishing success stood out in an era when American unions lost most organizing campaigns.

The SEIU started out as a Chicago janitors union in 1902, and the union built a strong core membership of janitors cleaning office buildings in urban markets, particularly New York City and Chicago. In the mid-1980s, a confluence of factors suddenly wiped out much of the union's strength. During the

1980s, commercial real estate ownership consolidated among a shrinking number of large developers and institutional investors. As real estate values tumbled in a cyclical crash, property owners began contracting out cleaning to independent janitorial companies that competed for business on price. Since labor constituted the single largest expense for a cleaning company, contractors constructed successful bids by trimming wages and benefits. In Los Angeles, for example, janitors' wages fell 36% from 1983 to 1989. Contractors hired newly arrived Central American immigrants, expecting quiescence from largely undocumented workers. In city after city, the union's predominantly African-American janitors swallowed contract concessions as they watched their membership evaporate.

A 1985 lockout in Pittsburgh roused the union to fight back. Members held the line against contract concessions in a yearlong struggle and galvanized the union to develop a plan to deal with the industry's transformation. The union's long-standing decentralization impeded a coordinated response. Powerful local presidents accustomed to autonomy and cordial contract bargaining sometimes refused to join multi-local campaigns, fearing erosion of their authority. Meanwhile, cleaning contractors had mushroomed into national and multinational firms with customer bases that far exceeded any local's ability to affect revenues enough to win with traditional union leverage like strikes.

The SEIU proceeded on two fronts: developing a centralized campaign apparatus, and deploying it in markets without resistant locals. The union created a new division to unite janitor locals under a coordinating umbrella. The division hired a crew of staffers, many from the United Farm Workers, with experience doing community organizing among Latino immigrants. A staffer, Stephen Lerner, helped craft the underlying theory: pressure building owners, not cleaning contractors, with demands for union recognition and fair contracts, since owners could oblige contractors to settle or lose the cleaning contract, and build the added cost of settlement into the contract terms.

They selected Denver in 1987 as the first market for new organizing and demonstrated the range of tactics that would characterize Justice for Janitors. The campaign attacked from above and below. Several contractors cleaned the Denver airport with union crews, while operating nonunion in the city. The union demanded that the political appointees on the airport governing board fire such "double-breasted" contractors unless they recognized the union in the city. Meanwhile, organizers laid out the plan to Latino janitors across the city and worked with community

groups to build coalitions. A cadre of militant janitors marched on their bosses with demands for union recognition and marched in the streets to pressure politicians. Justice for Janitors caught Denver by surprise and won sizable gains within a year.

Buoyed by success, the union turned to Atlanta in 1988. A prominent Atlanta real estate developer with close ties to the Democratic Party looked like a promising target as Atlanta hosted the Democratic National Convention. African-American janitors cleaning his buildings demonstrated when he refused to recognize them, and the union picketed his convention events and dressed their delegates in Justice for Janitors T-shirts. But the mayor crossed the picket line, and the party brass sided with their fund-raiser over the janitors. Atlanta showed that political pressure and street militancy would not be enough in most cities.

Los Angeles and Washington, DC, were the laboratories for honing strategy. Beginning in late 1988, organizers in Los Angeles started talking to the overwhelmingly Latino janitors and building committees of workers willing to act as shock troops. Many workers had fled bloody civil war and insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala (and some had fought in those conflicts, as insurgents or soldiers) and found civil disobedience far less daunting than did native-born workers. Janitor committees heckled building owners at restaurants and country clubs by day and signed up members in house visits and on bus rides at night. Meanwhile, organizers tallied unpaid overtime hours and safety problems and used the union's lawyers to assemble legal complaints alleging employer violations of federal wage and hour and safety laws. And the campaign used leaflets and raucous demonstrations to compel office-building tenants to force building owners to settle with the union. Tenants resented the publicity but invariably complained to owners, thus accomplishing the union's goals. After registering modest successes, the union came up against an intransigent employer in Century City, a large office complex. Janitors and organizers agitated for a strike. The workers struck in May 1990 and ran a noisy picket line filled with community allies. Tensions rose among building owners and police. On June 15, as janitors and their allies marched toward Century City, the police attacked, clubbing marchers in full view of television cameras. Public support for the janitors boiled over, obliging the mayor to speak out for the janitors and driving the union's powerful New York local president to finally threaten the cleaning contractor to settle in Los Angeles or risk unrest in New York. The contractor settled, and with a major contractor defeated, janitors rapidly seized the rest of the market, winning a master agreement by 1991.

Building owners proved more intractable in Washington DC, where they had a strong industry association to coordinate their opposition and the union had scant membership. The union dug in and experimented with tactics like protesting zoning changes desired by developers and challenging favorable real estate tax assessments. Civil disobedience escalated from marches and building-lobby demonstrations to highly coordinated mass actions like blocking major traffic arteries during rush hour. The local's African-American leadership, unprepared for an infusion of Latino workers, bucked the International and resisted the campaign. After seven years of pitched battle, the International called a public truce to ratchet down the hostilities and trusted the local. In 1997, the union finally began picking up settlements.

Several key organizing and bargaining concepts shaped Justice for Janitors. First, the union abjured National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)-supervised elections to demonstrate a majority and compel employer bargaining. With extremely high turnover among janitors and many undocumented workers, an election would represent only a snapshot in time of a fluctuating membership. Moreover, the NLRB procedures treated the cleaning contractor as the employer rather than the building owner, who actually controlled the bargaining relationship. Instead, organizers built a militant minority among janitors and pressed for recognition via a majority of signed union cards or a community election. This spared the union the endless litigation and arcane bureaucratic maneuvering that the NLRB election procedure had become. Second, the union negotiated "trigger" agreements with cleaning contractors that initially granted recognition and union rights but modest wage and benefit improvements. Once the union signed up a majority of contractors in a market, the agreements "triggered" negotiations among all the contractors to set a market rate. This strategy forestalled the problem of making a union contractor uncompetitive in a market shaped by labor costs. With a majority of contractors organized, no contractor was disadvantaged by the extra costs for higher wages and benefits. Trigger agreements functioned as a mechanism for pattern bargaining in the service sector, and the SEIU exported the practice to its other service-sector campaigns. The SEIU also laid the groundwork to link markets in national campaigns by lining up contracts in multiple cities to terminate on the same dates. And in 1995, the SEIU required all janitor contracts to include a provision stipulating the right to honor picket lines.

Critics generally assailed Justice for Janitors from two directions: union democracy and the trigger

agreements. Where recalcitrant local officials refused to participate, the SEIU simply removed them, installing trustees to run the locals and then running the trustees for the presidency. In some cases, these trustees came from the rank and file, like Rocio Saenz, a Mexican-born janitor who took over the Boston local; others came from the ranks of union staff organizers, like Mike Garcia in Los Angeles or Michael Fishman in New York. At the same time, the SEIU merged small city locals, many of which represented workers in multiple industries, into regional or state-wide janitorial locals; it was hard for rank-and-file workers to campaign or win office in these staff-run organizations.

As for the trigger agreements, which some derided as settlements for a "nickel and dues checkoff," criticism subsided abruptly after the SEIU ran a national rolling strike to win health-care benefits in 2000. In April, janitors walked out in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Chicago; as contracts expired in 30 markets, including New York, Cleveland, Chicago, and Seattle, contractors settled quickly, some before expiration. That October, janitors in Stamford and Hartford, Connecticut, struck for union recognition. Janitors routed contractors across the country, winning sizable wage increases and health-care benefits. The union turned to organizing the suburban markets around its strongholds and picked up Orange County, Long Island, suburban Chicago, and northern New Jersey. In 2000, Ken Loach, a leftist British filmmaker,

produced "Bread and Roses," a Hollywood movie based on the Los Angeles campaign. Justice for Janitors had arrived.

In 2005, 20 years after launching Justice for Janitors, over 70% of janitors in 23 of the top 50 U.S. cities were organized. Despite its great successes, however, the union had lost ground. The South remained overwhelmingly nonunion, and burgeoning suburban office markets added janitors much faster than the union could organize them. The SEIU estimated that its density in the industry had slipped from 40% in the 1950s to 10% in 1980 to 6% by 2000. But a victory in 2005 offered hope. Janitors in New York, Chicago, and dozens of other cities honored picket lines thrown up by Houston janitors working for the same building contractor. The contractor folded quickly, and the union won a master agreement in Houston, marking the first real beachhead in the South.

JENNIFER LUFF

References and Further Reading:

Bread and Roses. Directed by Ken Loach. 2000.
Waldinger, Roger, et al. "Helots No More: A Case Study of the Justice for Janitors Campaign in Los Angeles." In *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, edited by Kate Bronfenbrenner et al. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998.

See also **Service Employees' International Union**