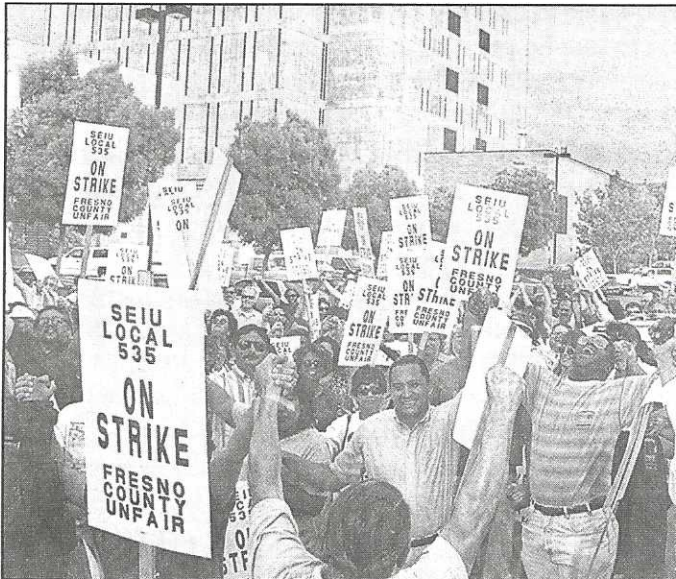




VOLUME 2, ISSUE 6



JUNE 1, 1997



Hector Amezcua, *The Fresno Bee*

Fresno County workers on strike!

by Mike Rhodes

The strike by Fresno County workers was front-page news for a week. More than 1,000 SEIU 535 members were on the picket lines and the union signed up hundreds of new members. The county was caught off guard, not believing the union had the strength or unity to pull off such a massive strike.

The county had offered its workers pay cuts, benefit take-aways, and job insecurity. The workers were demanding dignity. The main issue is definitely benefits. "Every year they're trying to take more of them from us. Pretty soon, there's not going to be anything to take away," said Debbie Hunt a correctional officer for Fresno County, as

she walked the picket line. Lana Purcell said, in an interview with the *Fresno Bee*: "This [strike] is a matter of principle for me. I'm 50 years old and raised three kids by myself. I'm not going to let [county officials] take away what I've worked so hard for."

The voices of the workers were raised as unity increased and more county workers left their jobs. County officials knew they were in trouble and began to negotiate a more reasonable contract with the union. For over a week the two sides met in

"Every year they're trying to take more benefits from us. Pretty soon, there's not going to be anything to take away."

long sessions to secure a contract that would secure dignity and justice for county workers.

As this newsletter goes to press, there are several outstanding issues that need to be resolved before an agreement can be reached. The Frank Little Chapter of the Labor Party and the *Labor/Community Alliance* believe that the Fresno County Board of Supervisors needs to feel additional community pressure to settle this contract. We urge all readers of this newsletter to call or write their supervisors and tell them to negotiate a fair contract with their employees.

District 1: Deran Koligian	488-3531
District 2: Sharon Levy	488-3531
District 3: Juan Arambula	488-3531
District 4: Tom Perch	488-3531
District 5: Stan Oken	488-3531
If you are calling from out of town: (800)742-1011	

If you would like to find out more about the strike or what you can do to help, call Pam Whalen: 277-6700.

The purpose

*of Labor/Community Alliance
is to strengthen and unite the
labor movement and the progressive
community in the Central San Joaquin
Valley through information sharing.
This publication is printed monthly and
includes a calendar of events. In addition
to providing the basis for mutual support
between labor and community groups,
this newsletter will be used to promote
dialog on the subject of creating an
independent political party for the
U.S. working class.*

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May 10 workshop a success

Our Corporate Power and the American Dream workshop was a great success, I don't mind saying. We had union people, students, college professors, community activists and average citizens from all parts of the Central Valley. More than 30 people participated and most of us stayed to the bitter end, buoyed by bagels, coffee, sandwiches and fruit (thanks to CSEA Chapter 379 and Andrea Castanon).

The training was facilitated by Gloria Sandoval and John Veen, who in turn were coached by workshop "master" Bill Hoyle. Bill is from Salt Lake City, where he usually works as a refinery worker for Chevron. He also writes safety manuals and conducts training in association with the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union and the Labor Institute.


The training method used was the Small Group Activity Method (SGAM), which precludes trainer pontification (usually). Everyone was supplied with workbooks and note-taking supplies; the groups selected alternating "scribes" to write down ideas and report back to the larger group.

Big corporations are writing the rules we live and frequently die by and either we get off our collective Ass and organize or we get squeezed like so many disposable, replaceable rags. That's my official conclusion, but there are at least 35 other ways to sum up our May 10 training—each participant had their own unique perspective, and that's what makes this method so interesting.

The workbooks are designed to provoke debate and get people thinking, and while the general direction people are pointed in is anti-boss, pro-worker, there is no ultimate ideological message. It's a grassroots method and the power is in the groups, not at the head of the class.

If you would like us to bring this workshop to your school, organization or neighborhood, please contact the Labor Party, Frank Little Chapter, P.O. Box 5077, Fresno, CA, 93755, or call me at (209) 226-2078.

~ J.Veen

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Kaiser strike update

*Cell phone report from Don Nielson,
California Nurses Association (CNA)*

We had a one-day strike for the whole Northern California region on April 16. Throughout the state, 7,500 nurses walked out for that day. In addition to that, 19,000 other Kaiser workers supported us and walked out. Total: 26,500. We shut down 45 facilities. It was a very successful strike.

We've been able to help people realize what the real issues are: it's not about wages, but about overall quality of patient care.

Kaiser is proposing mammoth pay cuts and reductions in RN jobs. That equates to cutting the number of lifeguards at the beach. By law nurses must be patient advocates. We're the first line of defense, and when health care corporations try to cut back or deny treatment, RNs are the ones to say: You can't do that!

We're negotiating, but things aren't going all that well. There may be another one-day strike in June.



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Peace Report

by Jack Welch

From Tri-Valley CAREs *Citizen's Watch*, April 1997:

Eighty-four percent of Americans say they would feel safer knowing that no country, including the United States, had nuclear weapons; 87 percent want the United States to negotiate an agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons. The public disagrees with budget priorities whereby the United States spends more on nuclear weapons than on Head Start, fighting illiteracy and providing college scholarships combined.

The Department of Energy (DOE) has announced it will conduct two "subcritical" underground nuclear tests this year at the Nevada Test Site. The first experiment, designed at Los Alamos, is scheduled this June. At the least, these experiments violate the spirit of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, recently signed by the United States, which bans "any nuclear explosion," and they threaten global acceptance of the treaty.

From *Facts for Action* (Fellowship of Reconciliation), April 1997: The U.N. General Assembly on March 13 overwhelmingly adopted a resolution condemning the new Jewish building of houses in Arab East Jerusalem. The United States cast one of only two votes in the Security Council against the measure; Israel cast the other.

Peace Centers meet with UFW at La Paz

The annual Peace Centers gathering met the weekend of April 25-27 in the retreat center operated by the United Farm Workers in the rugged foothills of the Tehachapi Mountains. The get-together also put in place, for the first time, plans for regular contact and networking between the centers and energetic discussion of key priorities for the coming year.

Arturo Rodriguez, who drove in from Watsonville especially for the gathering, outlined the strategy of current UFW organizing in Santa Cruz and Monterey County. Having won a series of individual contracts with strawberry growers only to have the owners plow under their fields and throw hundreds out of work, the union recognized the need to approach organization industry-wide. Doing outreach to the 10-12,000 strawberry workers in the area, the union began putting pressure on the growers by lining up 2,200 supermarkets committing to supporting the workers' demands for just wages and conditions. An executive of Ralph's Supermarkets marched in the Watsonville action, and Arturo will be meeting with Lucky's. He encourages us all to let our local supermarkets know we want them to support the demands of the UFW.

Sessions on Sunday included updates on Abolition 2000 anti-nuclear organizing and an eye-opening analysis of the deepening political and economic crisis in Mexico by Peter Lumsdaine of the Resource Center. As a broadening coalition of progressive groups in Mexico builds against the globalization strategies of multinational corporations, guerilla activities spread and the economy teeters, numerous signs point toward the danger of a major explosion on the continent. This danger, as well as the promise seen in work on Abolition 2000 and the desire to be able to support actions or boycotts that may grow out of the UFW's current struggle, fueled plans for regular phone conferencing between the groups, an e-mail network, and a commitment to improve the emergency response phone trees in our respective communities.



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National News

Seeing through the camouflage. Despite promises of U.S. jobs and better working conditions, NAFTA increased the incentives for firms to bargain down wages and working conditions in the United States, Canada and Mexico, and to shift jobs to Mexico. A new report from the institute for Policy Studies, *NAFTA's Corporate Camouflage*, reveals that six of the leading corporate NAFTA advocates used the threat of moving plants abroad to head off union organizing drives, and 12 of 28 manufacturers laid off workers who then qualified for the NAFTA retraining program. For copies of the report, call IPS at (202)234-9382.

Budget deal makes wrong choices. The budget agreement between the Clinton administration and Republican congressional leaders "makes the wrong choices for working families at a time when they can ill afford it, and rewards upper income taxpayers at a time when they least deserve it," the AFL-CIO Executive Council said in a resolution. The council promised to fight the capital gains and inheritance tax reductions and cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, public safety and the environment.



Action Motown '97. June 20-21, Detroit. An incredible show of labor solidarity will bring thousands of trade union activists to Detroit for two days of rallies and mass demonstrations against union-busting practices. Union members from across the country will pour into the Motor City on June 20 and 21 for Action! Motown '97, a mass mobilization against the actions of The Detroit News and Free Press.

"Stop Sweatshops" bill. Congressman Bill Clay (D-MO) and Congresswoman Nadia Velazquez (D-NY) introduced H.R. 23, "Stop the Sweatshops Act of 1997" into the House of Representatives. The bill, written by the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE!), would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 "to provide for legal accountability for sweatshop conditions in the garment industry." A similar bill will be introduced in the Senate by Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA). The House bill was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce.

Ohio city to take sweatshop proclamation to mayors' meeting. In January, the city of North Olmsted, Ohio, issued a proclamation that it will not buy products made by child labor or under sweatshop conditions. Now North Olmsted's mayor, Ed Boyle, plans to take his city's resolution to the National Conference of Mayors in San Francisco, June 20-24. If it passes, the resolution could provide leverage for local activists across the country.

Maintaining neutrality. Men have been dropped from the West Coast Longshore union, but in name only. The ILWU is now known as the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, a gender-neutral moniker that permits the union to retain its famous acronym. The change was unanimously adopted at ILWU's April convention.

Workers' Rights Boards support unorganized workers. Jobs with Justice Workers' Rights Boards (WRB) are committees made up of local labor, religious, political and community leaders who lend strategic support to unorganized workers fighting for justice. During a campaign for workers' rights, members of a WRB are called upon to exert moral and political persuasion aimed at turning around an unfair employer. When initial efforts fail, the WRB spearheads direct action, media blitzes and other highly visible and aggressive tactics to compel a boss to meet protest demands—or face widespread public exposure and scrutiny.

Ultimately, the WRB looks to promote alternative organizing models that unify and empower workers, while educating the broader community about workplace abuses and engaging everyday people in the struggle to improve employment standards.

Seven Jobs with Justice coalitions have established local Workers' Rights Boards: Burlington, VT; Cleveland, OH; Boston, MA; Western Massachusetts; Denver, CO; North Texas; and Buffalo, NY. In the near future, the New York City Jwj Workers' Rights Board should be launched. Each board has broken ground in different areas of WRB development.

From <http://www.igc.apc.org/jwj>



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Local News Briefs

Community resource directory available. Fresno Metro Ministry's *Making Connections Resource Directory 1997* is now available for distribution. This new edition contains up-to-date phone and fax numbers and addresses for non-profit agencies that offer services in the Fresno County area. Call the Metro office, 485-1416, to order. Please spread the word about this indispensable resource.

Community Welfare Conference a success. Some 175 people participated in the March 7 Welfare Conference at First Congregational Church sponsored by Fresno Metro Ministry. (For an insider's perspective, see comments by Del Berg, right.) Conference workshops wrestled with the question of which options open to the State of California are in the best interests of the people of Fresno County, as well as what improvements are needed in local service delivery systems. Forty participants agreed to serve as an ongoing steering committee to fine tune the follow-through on conference recommendations.

The Interfaith Council, including the California Council of Churches, has compiled a study book on welfare for congregations to use. Call Metro, 485-1416, for details.

Supplies and equipment needed for Central America.

Since 1985, the people of Fresno and the greater San Joaquin Valley have literally been a lifeline to thousands of people in Central America. Thanks to the generosity of Valley individuals and businesses, hundreds of people with disabilities now have crutches, walkers, canes and wheelchairs. More than 20,000 lbs. of medicine and medical equipment, plus tens of thousands of dollars of rebuilding equipment, is now being used by hospitals and clinics in El Salvador and Nicaragua to serve poor families.

Hundreds of individuals and organizations of all kinds have made this work possible, but more is needed. Health care is primitive, and many hospitals lack even the most basic antibiotics and simple medicines we take for granted. Schools operate with meager facilities and supplies. For information on how you can get involved, call Patrick Young at 251-3814, or write to The Wheelchair Project, 5202 E. Weldon, Fresno CA 93727. Checks made payable to The Wheelchair Project may be sent to that address.

HMO complaint hotline. Cigna, Aetna, FHP, Kaiser, PacifiCare and Wellpoint were among 43 California HMOs fined for violating the law that they must notify members of a toll-free hotline complaint number. If you or someone you know has an HMO complaint, call 1-800-400-0815.

Welfare Conference Report

by Del Berg

Del Berg, long-time political activist and a member of the Frank Little Chapter of the Labor Party, attended the March 7 Welfare Conference sponsored by Fresno Metro Ministry. He sent us the following comments:

The one observation I might make is that the emphasis seemed to be on the urgency of ameliorating the impact of "Welfare Reform" on its victims, as much as possible. While that was not a negative, it was defensive in character. But along with that there also seemed to be a mood of fight-back against the measures themselves.

I don't recall any specific proposals for a movement to repeal the national "Welfare Reform" act or to challenge Wilson's TANF. That was probably outside of the intended scope of the meeting. But such a broad involvement of individuals, groups and organizations with an intense concern about the problem indicates there is a base for it.

Implicit in the "Welfare Reform" act is the presumption that jobs are in plentiful supply, and all that is needed is for those on welfare to get off their lazy hind ends and go out to get them. If those who conceived the act had any wits about them, they would know there is no such reserve pool of jobs. But to admit that would defeat their purpose of dismantling social programs in the interest of maximizing corporate profits. To cover the hole in their basic premise, they fell back on the long-discredited trickle-down fantasy that envisions giving tax breaks, job training subsidies, etc. to business as an incentive for them to create jobs. Few, if any, people have faith in that solution.

What they have yet to fully grasp is that the only real alternative is for the government to assume its responsibility to provide for the well-being of the nation by enacting a full employment bill such as the one introduced by Congressman Mathew Martinez of Los Angeles, the "Job Creation and Infrastructure Restoration Act," better known as the "Martinez Public Works Jobs Bill." Even if it were possible to repeal the "Welfare Reform" measure in the foreseeable future, there is still a pressing need to enact this bill.

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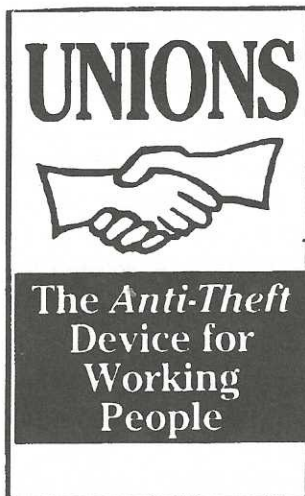
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International News

So that's her secret!

"Now we know Victoria's secret," and that of other upscale underwear merchants. "They make their fancy products in sweatshops," AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson said after touring the Dominican Republic's free trade zone. Undergarment Fashion's free trade zone plant manufactures Victoria's Secret and other product lines. It pays workers as little as \$21 a week, forces work weeks of 80 hours and allows supervisors to abuse workers. Chavez-Thompson expressed the AFL-CIO's solidarity with workers who are struggling for decent working conditions and the right to organize there and at other free trade zone factories.



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Disney, McDonald's linked to Vietnam sweatshop.

Seventeen-year-old women are forced to work nine to ten hours a day, seven days a week, earning as little as six cents an hour, in the Keyhinge factory in Vietnam making the popular giveaway promotional toys, many of which are Disney characters, for McDonald's Happy Meals. After working a 70-hour week, some of the teenage women take home a salary of only \$4.20! In February, 200 workers fell ill, 25 collapsed and three were hospitalized as a result of chemical exposure. All appeals from local human and labor rights groups continue to be rejected by Keyhinge management, which refuses to improve the ventilation system in the factory or remedy other unsafe working conditions. Along with demanding forced overtime, Keyhinge management has not made legally mandated payments for health insurance coverage for its employees, who now receive no compensation for injury or illness.

Action requested: Call, fax or write:

Michael Eisner, CEO Walt Disney Company 500 South Buena Vista Street Burbank, CA 91521 (818)560-1000/560-1930(fax)	James R. Cantalupo President, McDonald's Corp. 1 McDonald's Plaza Oakbrook, IL 60521 (630)623-3000/623-7409(fax)
--	--

Tet Ansamm (Heads Together)

Student group works to establish ties with Haitians

Socially progressive Haitian mayor Moïse Jean-Charles visited California recently. While in the Central Valley, he met with University of California agricultural researchers in Kerman and with interdenominational refugee ministries in Fresno.

Thirty-five Fresno-area residents met with Jean-Charles at the home of Emilie Parry, who is a member of Tet Ansamm (Heads Together), a student group working to establish helpful linkages between groups in U.S. schools and groups in Haiti. (Emilie is the daughter of Metro Ministry's Walt Parry.)

Mayor Jean-Charles spoke about the need for his community to grow food to feed the people of the area, noting the following obstacles to meeting that need:

- ① The World Bank and the United States are pressuring Haiti to "privatize" the land.
- ② Wealthy individuals and corporations acquire the "privatized" land and take it out of food production or do not allow it to be used for food production, in order to enrich their food import empires.
- ③ Over one-third of the land is in the hands of the church, one-third in the hands of private interests, and the remaining third in the hands of government. Thus it is not available for food production, even though much of the land is very viable for that purpose.

Excerpt from background materials supplied by Tet Ansamm:

In the 1995 municipal elections following the restoration of democracy and President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's return to power in late 1994, Moïse Jean-Charles, one of the leaders of the MPM and a well-known activist in Milot, was democratically elected Mayor in Milot, in recognition by his people of his organizational efforts to struggle on their behalf. He immediately took steps to legally promote land reform (which he sees as "the first step to everything else"), municipal administrative reform and coalition building with 28 other democratically elected, progressive mayors in the North and North-East Departments of Haiti.

One of Milot's recent successes has been the establishment of *Radio Viva Peyizan Milot* (RVPM, "Radio of the Voice of the Peasants of Milot"), a progressive community radio station that can be heard through the surrounding area. Its mission is to serve as the mouthpiece for legitimate interests, opinions, beliefs and grievances, and increase local consciousness of the significance of having such an opportunity.

Union effect on fringe benefits

by Hal Sadler

Much of the material to follow is from the book *What Do Unions Do?* by Richard Freeman and James Medoff, Harvard University, Basic Books. The authors made an exhaustive study of unions and fringe benefits, as well as what unions do in many other areas, such as wages, job tenure, role of seniority, productivity, profits and the effect of unions on non-organized labor.

The book received warm reviews from many quarters. *Business Week* called it "the most complete statistical profile ever compiled on the effect of unions on wages and productivity." *American Political Science Review* categorized it as "a valuable work, full of useful and carefully arrived at findings."

The analysis of fringe benefits indicates there is little difference between union and non-union establishments in the proportion of compensation spent on legally required fringes such as Social Security, Unemployment Compensation, Workers' Compensation Insurance, State Disability Insurance, etc. than non-unionized employees.

In a study of recently unionized white-collar workers, it was found that immediately after organization 35 percent of the firms

their pension programs, 35 improved health programs and 21 percent sick leave

Workers who began as union members and became non-union went from having 17 percent more than the average number of fringes to having 7 percent fewer fringes.

improved pension programs and increased

ances. Since non-union white-collar workers generally have some fringes already, it seemed likely that unionization would have greater impacts on newly organized blue-collar work groups. In a sample of blue-collar workers who were non-union and became union workers, they went from having 18 percent fewer benefits than the average worker to having 10 percent more fringes than the average in the period in which they changed union status. Workers who began as union members and became non-union went from having 17 percent more than the average number of fringes to having 7 percent fewer fringes. Benefit programs instituted as a result of unions differ in rules and regulations from those set up by management in the absence of unionization.

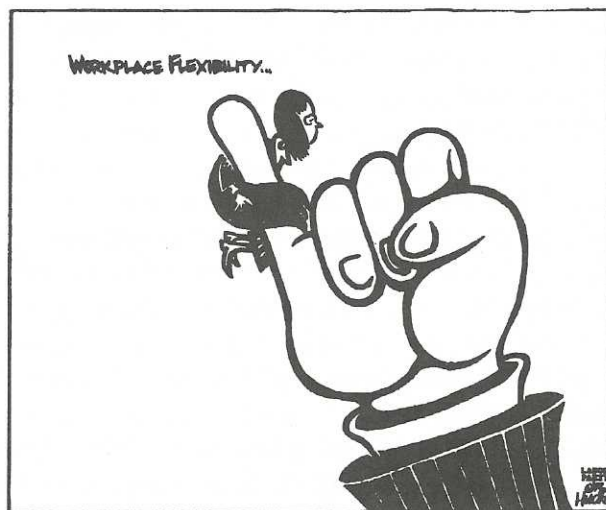
A prime example of the difference between union and non-union fringe programs is in the area of pensions. Union pension plans tend to be defined-benefit plans, which promise workers definite amounts of retirement pay, rather than defined-contribution plans, which invest money and pay workers the return on investment. In 1977, 89 percent of union private pension plans were of the defined-benefit type, compared with 35 percent of non-union private pension plans. The union preference for defined-benefit plans also reflects

the desire of unions and workers to avoid the risk of allowing retirement pay to depend on fluctuations in capital markets.

Unions have especially great impacts on fringes in industries where workers are more attached to occupation than to employers (construction, for example), and in sectors where firms are relatively small (such as trucking). To overcome the fringe benefit problems of occupations such as construction workers who will probably work for many employers, and those who work for small firms, unions have pioneered with plans to make benefits portable across employers. Multi-employer programs, initiated by unions, provide workers with benefits otherwise unavailable in their sector. The vast majority of multi-employee benefit plans are union run (68 percent in the pension plan file of the Office of Pension and Welfare Benefit Programs, Department of Labor).

Another area of union effect on fringes is the recognition that pension funds represent a growing source of capital in the United States and that pension funds offer unions a potential tool to influence the economy. Many union leaders have expressed the desire to influence the allocation of pension money, at least to discourage investment of union members' funds in non- or anti-union firms. The Executive Council of the AFL-CIO declared a Policy Goal: "To exclude from pension plan portfolios, companies whose policies are hostile to workers' rights." The new union effort to redirect pension moneys has begun to have an effect, particularly in the construction area. In California, unions have organized a consortium of 20 construction union pension funds, which has invested millions in union construction projects. Similar consortia have been organized in other states.

In summary, the union effect on benefits has been entirely positive, proving that unionization is the most important step on the path to economic security and quality of life for workers.



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Labor Party (Frank Little Chapter)
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• Address Correction Requested •

Letters to the Editor

Whose control?

I send hearty congratulations for Richard Stone's treatment of Promise Keepers in the May edition of *Labor/Community Alliance*. The point that helped me most was Mr. Stone's reflection of thousands of men giving themselves over to the control of a group mind. Whose mind? It reminded me of all the cries for law and order from Richard Nixon's cronies. At that time I asked, whose law? Whose order? Again, my thanks to Richard Stone.

Martin Young, Fresno

Keepers bashing

We were shocked and dismayed when we read the recent editorial concerning the Promise Keepers. Have you forgotten that religious groups are part of the community you are trying to connect with? These types of articles do not bring labor and the community together, they fracture the relationship(s).

We wonder if Mr. Stone has ever attended a Promise Keepers event. We wonder if Mr. Stone has ever read the Bible, especially about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In order to pass judgment on the Promise Keepers, we feel Mr. Stone should attend their June event. This will help Mr. Stone understand their program.

In conclusion, we would like to answer Mr. Stone's question regarding what will happen to those people that do not embrace Jesus as their personal Savior:

Read John 3:16-18. Very plain and simple.

Sincerely and God Bless you,
Tim and Carla Liermann, Coarsegold

P.S. Articles that are overly judgmental do not help lift labor and the community to a single voice.

