

Local 521 Constitutional Convention

We the Union...



It promises to be a thrilling summer for Local 521 as members get a once-in-a-lifetime chance to shape the Constitution of our Union. We start in April by electing delegates to represent our individual chapters at the July Constitutional Convention. These are people we know and trust to represent us wisely and with integrity.

"Today was a glimpse at worker democracy and our Union is carrying that out. We don't need to go anywhere, it's right here."

– Ray Baeza, Roads Maintenance Worker IV
(Santa Clara County)

As most members recall, after our five locals voted to merge into one entity in 2007, International SEIU President Andy Stern appointed member leaders to Executive and Advisory board positions pending a constitution and elections. Under labor laws governing mergers, Local 521 would have a limited amount of time from the date of merger to put everything in place.

So here we go ...

We will send some 400 elected delegates to the July 17-19 Convention in San Jose, where they will discuss ideas for bylaws, officer elections and a local-wide dues structure. All chapters will be represented at the convention.



A Bylaws Committee will then be appointed, and the committee will forward its recommendations to the Executive Board for approval.

In October 16-18, the same convention delegates will reconvene to finish their work at the "wrap-up" Constitutional

Convention. Delegates will be trained on the new proposed bylaws so that they can go back to their chapters and inform the membership.

"In my legacy local, we counted on the bylaws a lot and we followed those rules. In the last couple of years, I have been anxious that we didn't have any structure. In sitting in these groups today, I see that people have good will and I am glad that other members are interested in the bylaws, too."

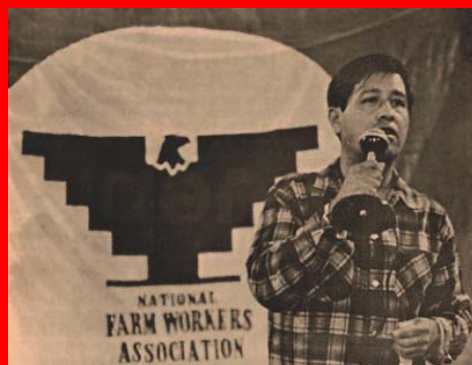
– Jeffrey Smedberg Recycling Coordinator
(Santa Cruz County)

In November, all members will vote on the bylaws. After that we elect Officers for the Union and by February 2010, a new Executive Board for Local 521 will be seated.

As you can see, democracy takes time, but it ensures that every member has a say in building our Union, together.

Prayer of the Farm Workers' Struggle

Written by César E. Chávez, UFW Founder



March 31, 1927 ~ April 23, 1993

Show me the suffering of the most miserable; so I will know my people's plight.

Free me to pray for others; for you are present in every person.

Help me to take responsibility for my own life; so that I can be free at last.

Grant me courage to serve others; for in service there is true life.

Give me honesty and patience; so that I can work with other workers.

Bring forth song and celebration; so that the spirit will be alive among us.

Let the spirit flourish and grow; so we will never tire of the struggle.

Let us remember those who have died for justice; for they have given us life.

Help us love even those who hate us; so we can change the world.

AROUND THE LOCAL

A snapshot of what's happening around Local 521

★ **San Mateo County:** After months of dealing with harassment from management, county workers from the Public Health Department united to exercise their voice in the workplace and marched on the boss. They were successful in bringing attention to their issues and starting an HR investigation on the managers involved.

★ **Santa Clara County:** Members have signaled overwhelming support to extend their contracts for two more years. The other option was to open negotiations with the county, which faces a \$220 million budget shortfall in the coming fiscal year, and would likely have pushed for member take-aways.

★ **Santa Clara County Office of Education:** Hundreds of SCCOE workers turned out at 9 different polling locations across the county in February to vote to approve the recommended contract settlement with the District. The final vote was overwhelmingly in favor of approving the negotiating team's recommendation.

★ **City of Palo Alto:** A city "Green Team" has been formed and includes management, fire department and SEIU employees volunteering to help city facilities go "green" to improve operations; 24 SEIU employees are Green Team members! Meetings are monthly and the group is working on an education and awareness campaign for employees. The Green Team is part of a community-wide effort involving schools, businesses, non-profits, Stanford, Palo Alto neighborhoods, faith-based groups, and others all working together to improve the environment.

★ **Cupertino Union School District:** With a \$3.2 million budget deficit for the 2009/2010 school year and \$7.2 million deficit for 2010/2011 at CUSD, SEIU and other represented groups are working with the District to help pass a parcel tax. The parcel tax will not prevent layoffs from happening, but it certainly will minimize the impact to the District. Without the tax, classified staff will see an enormous reduction. SEIU has contributed \$10,000 in COPE funds to help in the campaign. If you're not paying into COPE, now would be a great time to start contributing. Everyone is out talking to voters and phone-banking to pass the tax.

★ **Morgan Hill Unified School District:** The collective bargaining agreement between Classified Staff and the District was ratified overwhelmingly by the membership and approved by the Board of Education. The bleak economic picture meant there was no money to negotiate. All represented groups agreed to forgo COLA for 2008/09. However, there have been significant gains in language items.

Back row: Art Carrillo, Alex Alvarez, Maria Navarro, Desiree Gomez, Faline Ortiz, Local 521 Internal Organizer Joel Hill, Front row: Jose Garcia and Arturo Felix.

★ **Fresno County:** Fresno County workers have collected hundreds of signatures demanding that their County Administrator rescind his recent 18% raise. Members have been meeting with supervisors, two of whom have said they will vote to rescind the salary increase. Fresno County announced the layoff of 75 workers and closed Crisis Intervention Services in the Department of Mental health due to its budget deficit. The CAO also wants mandatory furloughs for more than 4,000 workers.

★ **Tulare County:** Workers circulated petitions throughout the community asking the Board of Supervisors to decline a 4.5 percent raise and \$500 one-time payment they authorized for themselves in light of the layoff of 185 workers in January and February. Nearly 500 signatures were presented at the February 10 Tulare County Board of Supervisors meeting. Two supervisors, Mike Ennis and Pete Vander Poel, pledged to decline the raise and one-time payment, while three others deferred their decision.

★ **City of Bakersfield:** Chapter Bylaws developed by the City Employee bylaws committee were overwhelmingly ratified by 92 percent of members voting. Chapter leadership is preparing for officer elections. Also, 95% of blue collar voters agreed to begin paying into State Disability Insurance or SDI.

★ **Santa Cruz County:** Members throughout the Santa Cruz area are facing huge cuts due to the recessionary effects of the economy. Their goal now is to rescue the services they provide. Many chapters have formed Budget Action Teams (BATs) and are actively seeking solutions.

★ **Monterey County:** Public Works and Administrative workers from the City of Greenfield joined Local 521 and ratified their first contract in March.



Member Leaders Talk Openly During Retreat



"I had many different conversations with people who were like me and with people who were not like me. I respect all the different ideas. I'm seeing a lot of good things going on in the Union right now, and this forum gave people a chance to speak, to be heard, and interact with other people and build something bigger."
- Ben Franklin, Eligibility Supervisor (Monterey County)



"I participated in many groups and I am glad that I was able to be part of the honesty and strength."
- Dutch Kooren, Supervisor & Psychiatric Nurse (Kern County - Mental Health Dept.)

The Executive and Advisory boards for SEIU Local 521 met on February 7 for a day-long open conversation about the future of Local 521 as it establishes a process and timeline for developing bylaws, leadership and a new dues structure.

There was no agenda; no topic was off-limits. Anyone could join any group to talk about anything. The technique of using open-ended dialogue in group discussions is called "Open Space." The goal was to begin to gather information and ideas to build the foundation for Local 521. It was also a chance for the 80 member leaders to experience for themselves the process which will be used to gather input from the wider local at the July Constitutional Convention.

"It renews me."
- Wanda Wallace, Social Services Supervisor II (Kern County)

The February session started with members naming topics for which they had ideas and passion. These "hosts" then posted their topics and invited other like-minded members to join them for a free exchange. As many as half a dozen mini-groups would form concurrently, their size varying depending on the topic's popularity. If at any point the conversation lost its appeal, any member was free to

"I want to thank you everyone for your open-ended listening. So often, we don't take the time to listen to each other. Thank you."
- Catherine Farnham, Public Health Nurse (San Benito County)

"Union work is so much about belief and passion. We will all reach the same conclusions but through different roads."
- Catherine Alexander, Librarian II & Webmaster (Santa Clara County Libraries)

leave to join a different group. In all, more than 30 separate conversations took place. In the end, notes of everything that was said were typed up and compiled in a "Book of Proceedings." (Visit www.seiu521.org to read)

The ideas and opinions from the first Open Space session will be incorporated with those gathered at the July Constitutional Convention, when 400 delegates localwide will come together.

"Everybody has a say. We're able to discuss openly without fear, without being shut down. I'm really proud of what we accomplished today."
- Dean Carothers, Child Support Officer (Monterey County)



"I got a chance to pick and choose which topic I wanted to sit in and discuss and be a part of. I really appreciated Open Space."
- Carolyn Gipson, Admin Assistant (Momentum for Mental Health)

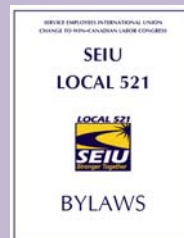


What are Bylaws?

Bylaws are the rules that govern how our union is to be run and operated. They include the rights and powers of union officers and the Executive Board members. When five SEIU locals consolidated into one in 2007, Local 521 established provisional bylaws.

At the upcoming Local 521 Constitutional Convention, member delegates will make recommendations for permanent bylaws.

For a copy of our provisional constitution and bylaws go to www.seiu521.org and click on **“Executive Board Budget & Actions.”**



Role of the Delegate

Local 521 convention delegates will have an important task assigned to them. One or more delegates from each chapter will be chosen to work with other delegates to determine Local 521 Bylaws, officer elections, and a localwide dues structure.

Delegates will attend two three-day conventions; the first is July 17-19; the second in October 16-18. All delegates will be trained prior to the convention and provided with the background information they need to participate fully in the convention process.

Using an open-dialogue technique called “Open Space,” broad topics will be given and participants will give input, ideas and proposals. Discussion

from all meetings will be compiled into a “Book of Proceedings” from which an appointed committee will draft a set of bylaws.

WANTED!

CONVENTION DELEGATES NEEDED:
Must be willing to think outside the box, work well with others and communicate knowledge gained back to chapter membership.

Delegates will then attend the second convention, during which they will par-

ticipate in workshops so that they thoroughly understand the proposed bylaws.

The delegates’ most important job comes next: Making sure all members in their chapter know what they will be voting on. Every member should be educated on the bylaws so that voting is not just a default decision.

“A delegate’s most important role is to determine what they want our Union to look like. They’re the ones who will take it back to their membership. It’s a great responsibility not to be taken lightly. They will affect members 20 years down the road.”

– Dean Carothers, Child Support Officer (Monterey County), SEIU Local 521 Executive Board Member



Ask Kristy

From time to time, SEIU members might have questions for **Local 521 President Kristy Sermersheim.**

Send questions to:
communications@seiu521.org

Q: “Now that we are members, how does one go about finding out or accessing union benefits?”

– Arturo Felix (City of Greenfield)

A: First, let me welcome you to the Local 521 family, we are thrilled to have you. Indeed, union membership comes with many benefits, not the least of which is Union pride and strength. Here are some direct pocket-savings: With SEIU-Union Plus benefits, you can save on life insurance,

prescriptions, mortgages, legal services and more. For more info, visit www.seiu521.org and www.unionplus.org. You can also call Local 521 at 877-734-8521 or Union Plus at 800-452-9425.

Q: *Why should workers in the Peninsula care about workers in the Central Valley?*
– Ronnie Smith (City of Menlo Park)

A: We could be glib about it and say, “We should support others in the labor movement.” But, let’s get real. We ALL should care about the Central Valley. As long as working people who vote in Tulare, Stanislaus, Kings, Fresno and Kern counties keep sending folks to Sacramento who vote against publicly funded services, we are all in jeopardy of losing precious jobs, benefits, and public services. It takes two-thirds of the legislature to

protect PERS retirement, to fund universities and colleges, mental health and public safety. Working through our union, members in the Central Valley will begin to send more pro-worker legislators to Sacramento and Congress.

Beyond that, many of us have friends or family who call the Central Valley home. We need to help them clear the air they breathe and find ways to conserve the water they use. We are all connected; their air becomes our air, the water they use grows the food we eat.

Finally if, because of weakness, they are forced to settle for sub-standard union contracts, we know our employers will hold those contracts up as examples. It will be harder and harder to protect what we have and to win more.