



**SEIU 521**

# Fighting for a Fair Economy



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## Our economy is not working

Layoffs. Home foreclosures. Attacks on our pensions. 2011 was the year working families started fighting back. We call it the Fight for a Fair Economy. All around us are constant reminders that the economy is not working for us.

Not coincidentally, wealthy CEOs and corporations continue to avoid paying their fair share of taxes, while we lose vital public services, healthcare, and retirement security. Union strength in the public and private sectors have been gradually eroding.

as union members, but as community members, as Democrats and Republicans, *as voters*.

This *Annual Review* highlights what SEIU Local 521 members did as our part in 2011—from fighting for collective bargaining rights for Wisconsin workers to protecting retirement security for all.

This is the time we must join together and continue the Fight for a Fair Economy in which everyone pays their fair share. We must rebuild a strong middle class. For our families, for our community, for our future.

The richest 10 percent in America controls two-thirds of Americans' net worth.\*

\* *Mother Jones* (March/April issue)

And the ever-growing gap between the wealthy and the middle class means working families are paying the price.

### The solution is us

If the problem is the economy, then the solution is us. Not just

## Fighting in solidarity

Wall Street and big banks crashed our economy, but somehow public workers became the target.

Wisconsin went the furthest, with the governor stripping collective bargaining rights away from workers in March. When more anti-union attacks quickly popped up across the country, SEIU members responded with nationwide solidarity actions on April 4, 2011. On the home front, Local 521 members held actions from the Bay Area to the Central Valley.

*"It's time all workers reject these politically motivated attacks and work together to create jobs and rebuild our economy,"* said **John Kovarick**, a Santa Cruz County worker.



Members rally in Fresno on April 4, 2011. In a roaring backlash to attacks on public employees, thousands of SEIU members nationwide took part in actions that day.



When Kern County management demanded only takeaways, SEIU 521 members took their message to the public in a series of weekend rallies in February.

## Fighting for our contracts: Redefined

At the foundation of a union workplace is a labor contract. All our rights as workers stem from our right to bargain collectively, to be able to rely on a written document.

But in these times, it's not enough to simply come to the table armed with facts and a willingness to negotiate. Many employers have adopted a hostile, anti-worker attitude meant to score political points at their employees' expense. In response, workers all throughout Local 521 have taken to the streets and to the airwaves to campaign for fair contracts.

**Members successfully bargained contracts:**

- ◆ In Hanford, members began paying their pension contribution but received a raise that more than covered the cost.
- ◆ In Monterey County, members averted layoffs by agreeing to increase their retirement contribution.
- ◆ The members of Salud Para La Gente stood strong against an unfair “merit pay” proposal and won a contract that lets workers stand strong together.

But at the same time, members have had to fight against aggressive campaigns aimed at weakening workers' rights and wages. They have countered with

rallies, letter-writing campaigns and individual meetings with our elected leaders.

With major contract campaigns coming up all around Local 521's territory, it's important for workers to stand Stronger Together.

A union contract and representation results in an average pay that is \$4.95 an hour, or \$10,400 a year, more than the same worker would make without a union.

## Fighting for retirement security

When powerful moneyed interests sought to paint public workers, instead of the financial sector, as the problem, they targeted our pensions. Local 521 members fought back, pointing out that pensions are the most cost-effective way to provide true retirement security.

**Matt Nathanson**, Region 2 Vice President, summed up why we fight in an interview with the Salinas Californian:

*"This is really, for me, a way of making sure that someone can afford to live in the community where they've worked their whole lives. The advantage of a pension system is that it allows those of us who don't make a lot of money to be able to retire."*

The fight wasn't just in public discourse, though. At the ballot box, SEIU members helped get **Michael Bilbrey** elected to the CalPERS Board of Administration. It's important that we elect politicians and administrators who understand and value retirement security, and Bilbrey is one of those.

Local 521 members on the localwide Pension Committee are following closely the work of a legislative conference committee that is holding hearings on Gov. Jerry Brown's 12-point pension reform plan.

*"Pensions are a negotiated benefit. No one size can fit all, and yet that's what the governor*

The median monthly pension for a public employee in CalPERS is \$1,499. The average public worker spent 20 years in public service to earn that pension.

*is proposing,"* **Rachel Grocha-Welch** said at a December public hearing in Sacramento.

Local 521 and virtually all union groups oppose three key elements in Brown's proposal:

- Mandating an "equal sharing of pension costs"
- Implementing a "hybrid risk-sharing pension"
- Increasing retirement ages

Many pension experts question the merits of the governor's plan and its dangerous trespass into the territory of collective bargaining and vested rights of workers.

*"I think the private sector is getting screwed,"* because 401(k)-style investments evaporated during the Wall Street collapse, said the committee's co-chairman Assembly Member Warren Furutani. *"But that doesn't mean the solution is to screw the public sector."*

The committee is made up of both Democratic and Republican legislators. Its pension reform recommendations would be voted on by the full Legislature. More hearings will be scheduled in January.



Rachel Grocha-Welch (l), forensic chemist from Santa Clara County, and Bob Sigala (r), a retired member, attended a public hearing on pension reform in December.

## Fighting for jobs

With state unemployment topping 12 percent, jobs took center stage for SEIU during the month of August.

Local 521 members were part of a nationwide movement that demanded that Congress stop playing politics and start creating jobs.

*"We need to reach out to our congressional representatives and demand they focus on job creation and protecting the jobs that Americans already have,"* said Region 5 Vice President **Greg Gomez**. *"America doesn't need a divided House. We need jobs, jobs, jobs."*

August is typically the month when congressional representatives return to their home towns before going back to Washington.

Across the nation they were met by their constituents who



Rep. Mike Honda (D-San Jose) listens to constituents August 23 at a town hall meeting on jobs.

expressed anger and frustration with the lack of available jobs in their communities and with Congress's failure to work on job development.

Local 521 members spoke directly to their representatives in San Jose, San Mateo, Salinas, Fresno and Visalia.

On Aug. 25, residents of Tulare County, where unemployment

has climbed to 17 percent, went to Rep. Devin Nunes' (R-Visalia) office. They wanted to tell him to get to work on generating jobs for his district instead of tax cuts for Wall Street.

*"We are here to tell Devin Nunes to get off his duff and get us some jobs by any way possible,"* said **Deana Worthington**, who works at the Porterville office for Tulare County HHS.

But Nunes was nowhere to be found.

*"This country is no longer able to fulfill its commitment to its citizens,"* said **Dolly Clemente**, a homecare worker and Local 521 member, at the Rep. Honda town hall meeting. *"We need your support for working families to survive this recession and we need your support to revive the middle class."*



SEIU 521 retiree member **Karen Lemes** urges Rep. Honda to create jobs and protect services during one of the many town halls held in August.

### In 2009:

- ◆ Our productivity went UP 9 percent, but our wages went DOWN 4.5 percent
- ◆ Wall Street bonuses went up 17 percent
- ◆ The number of millionaires went up 16 percent
- ◆ And the CEOs of the 50 corporations that laid off the most workers were rewarded with 42 percent higher salaries

## Rebuilding unions and the middle class

The battle for the American middle class can't be won without organization, coordination, and people committed to the cause. That's why Local 521 members have united.

Dozens went to the Member Leadership and Action Conference in Los Angeles in March, where 1,500 SEIU members from around the country gathered to learn how to organize and how to fight the political and economic forces assaulting us.

*"I've had a phenomenal transformation. I am no longer a steward for 42 people; I am a community advocate. Sitting across from more than a thousand other brothers and sisters made me realize this is an attack on our family, and we need to fight back."*

– Joanne Mercado, eligibility worker (County of Santa Clara)

The members who went were designated as members of T.E.A.M. (Transform, Educate, Agitate, Mobilize). Over the next year, T.E.A.M. will be pivotal in our defense of the middle class.

### Fighting to rebuild union strength

Fighting in the political arena is only part of the necessary battle.

We know the difference a union makes in the lives of working families: Good jobs, good pay, and good benefits that help us take care of our families. But in today's unbalanced economy, unions have been shrinking while CEOs snatch larger and larger portions of wealth.

In the 1950s about 35 percent of workers had a union. By 2006 union jobs shrank to only 12 percent. It's no surprise that workers' wages and benefits are sharply declining along with



Building the union: Service and Maintenance employees of Tulare Regional Medical Center petitioned hospital management for union recognition August 2011.

union jobs. To create a fair economy for all, we need to reverse this trend and bring more people into unions.

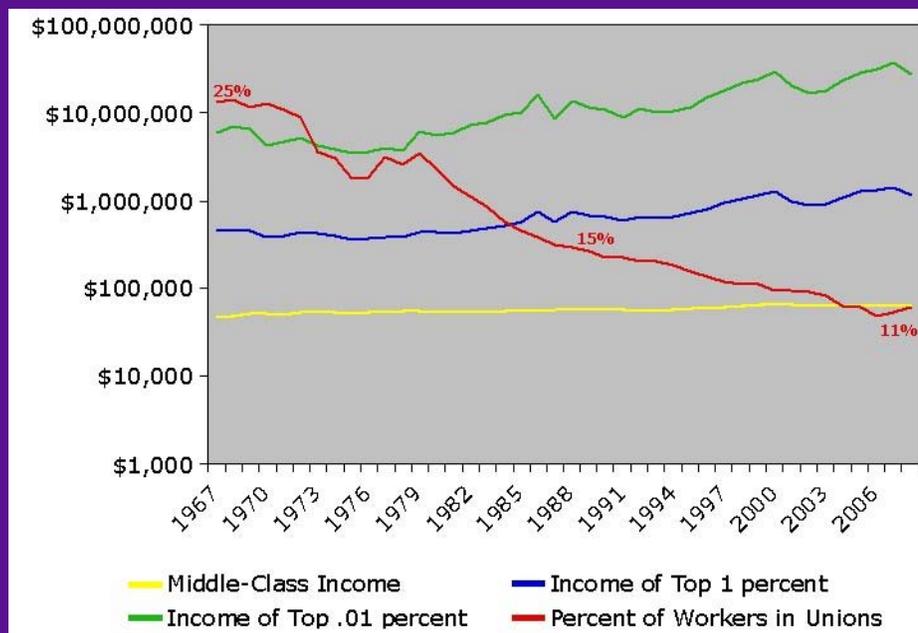
### National Organizing Corps takes action in Oregon and California

Members of SEIU's National Organizing Corps (NOC) are stepping up to boost union membership.

NOC was formed last year by SEIU members—including 77 from Local 521—who received training on organizing new workers. This year Local 521 NOC members helped bring 7,500 Oregon state workers into SEIU. In California, our NOC members also helped organize service maintenance workers at Tulare Regional Medical Center.

*"Having a strong middle class means having strong union membership. Union density has been on the decline, so it's critical we organize the unorganized workers if we're going to form a fair economy and rebuild the middle class."*

– Rosemary Romo, Member Organizing Committee Chair



All the economic gains of the last few decades have gone to the super-rich, while the middle class have held on by their fingertips. And, not coincidentally, union density has dropped.

## Fighting hunger in our communities

At a time when California's unemployment rate remains in the double digits and working families continue struggling with foreclosures, Local 521's members really stepped up to the plate by helping hungry families in our communities.

This year, Local 521 members launched our first-ever union-wide canned food drive, called "Food for All." We collected 3,200 pounds of food from 15 cities and 65 worksites.



SEIU 521 members raised enough to provide 7,000 meals to hungry families in May 2011.

Combined with cash donations, members raised enough to

provide more than 7,000 meals to children and families across a half-dozen counties, from Monterey to Kern.

"We deeply appreciate Local 521's generous donations of food at a time when the need is greatest," said Ben Coyle, outreach specialist for the Community Action Partnership of Kern, one of the many agencies that received Food for All donations.

## We are the 99%!

Waving signs, chanting, and shouting their message from bridges and government centers, hundreds of Local 521 members and community leaders took to the streets throughout Northern and Central California Nov. 17 as part of an Occupy national day of action.

SEIU members peacefully joined the Occupy movement at sites across the country to demand an economy that works for everyone, not just corporations and the wealthy.

Locally, Local 521 members converged in Fresno, Bakersfield, Santa Cruz and San Jose and shouted with one unified voice: "We are the 99%!"

Three years after Wall Street wrecked our economy, 25 million people are still unable to find full-time work and the income inequality between the wealthy and working families keeps growing. Instead of creating jobs, Congress keeps



focusing on job-killing budget cuts.

"Something is wrong, something is broken, and we are going to stand up and fight!" declared **Roseann Berthron-Arechiga**, an Eligibility Worker in Santa Clara County.



Roseann Berthron-Arechiga addresses the "We are the 99%" rally in San Jose in November.

The wealthiest 1 percent in America owns 42 percent of our nation's wealth.

## Fighting for healthcare

Local 521 members helped get the Affordable Care Act passed in 2010. In 2011, we geared up for the future.

At Kern Medical Center in Bakersfield, Natividad Medical Center in Salinas, and Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose, members are working with management to position their hospitals as the hospital of choice in their area.

Under the Affordable Care Act, people who today must choose a public hospital will have a choice in

In the first three months of 2011, more than 600,000 young adults added insurance coverage through their parents' policies.

This would not have been possible before the Affordable Care Act.

This protects them and helps lower costs for all of us.



Members of Kern Medical Center staff in July discuss with KMC Director Paul Hensler how to change the hospital culture for a better position in the future.

the future. By improving patients' perceptions of their care, the nurses and other workers in the hospitals will give patients a reason to choose public hospitals.

*"Nurses and other healthcare workers are on the front line of healthcare reform. By taking this into our own hands, we can make sure we provide the best patient care in California."*

– Anna Moreno, Kern Medical Center

## Fighting for our rights

Our contracts and rights need to be protected.

That's why Local 521 members have a Contract Enforcement Department (CED).

In 2011 CED negotiated and closed more than 900 cases on members' behalf, including work-

site grievances, disciplinary actions, and getting people who were wrongfully terminated their jobs back.

In many cases, CED also won members monetary awards, such as for Local 521 member Andrew, a City of Palo Alto employee. He won \$20,000 in back pay for

working out of class.

*"521 worked very effectively and collaboratively with the City to uphold our contract and ensure the issue was not 'swept under the rug',"* said **Andrew**. *"Without their help, the issue would still be ongoing and a fair settlement would not have been reached."*

**If you have a disciplinary action against you or your contract has been violated, contact your steward or a Contract Enforcement Specialist Assistant in your region.**

## Contract Enforcement Department

**Bakersfield and Hanford**

☎ (661) 321-4181

*Vicki Avila*

**Fresno and Visalia**

☎ (559) 447-2576

*Rachel Tudor*

**Santa Cruz and Salinas**

☎ (831) 824-9268

*Christopher Cox*

**San Jose and San Carlos**

☎ (408) 678-3348

*Diego Valdez*