

Immigrant Workers and Social Movement Unionism

— A Case of San Francisco Bay Area —

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, many scholars have pointed out the revitalization of the labor movement in the United States. This is partly because many resources in the labor movement have been mobilized for organizing activities particularly for immigrant workers and these immigrants, who were thought not to be organized, have been actually organized into various types of organizations, since John Sweeny of the Service Employees International Unions (SEIU) was elected the president of the American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL - CIO) in 1995.

The new trend in the American labor movement characterized by broad organizing activities is often called social movement unionism (SMU) in comparison with conventional business unionism. Often through the implementation of radical activities, SMU also seems to seek institutional changes in American society: for example, extending social benefits for low-wage workers, legislating for the protection of basic rights of immigrants, and so forth. In this way, SMU has various features, one of which is among organizing activities for immigrants.

This paper examines these activities on the basis of my field work. However, it is a short interim report of this field work on SMU in the San Francisco Bay Area.¹ Therefore, the following findings are not definite but tentative, and the purpose of this paper is not to come to a conclusion on some aspects of SMU but to clarify the tasks to be done in my future research.

This paper consists of three parts. First, some features of SMU - regarding its background, subject, industry, organization, and directionality - are listed, and questions on such features are illustrated. Second, among these questions, the organizational activities for immigrants are addressed and examined in the perspective of social networks or social capital. Immigrants have their own social networks originating from their native home society.

As is well known, these networks render it easier for newcomers to find a home and get jobs. However, the function of these networks in the process of organizational activities in unions and other labor organizations has been less clarified. What kinds of function do they have in union organizational activities? To what extent are these networks mobilized into unions and worker centers? Are there any differences between unions and worker centers for these networks, if they are mobilized into such organizations? Based on the findings of my field work, these questions will be tried to answer in this paper.

Third, a new type of labor movement executed by a non-profit organization (NPO), which is

¹ This field work was done during my stay at the University of California, Berkeley as a visiting scholar and will continue in three years. This is just an interim report and its findings are tentative. I owed a lot of gratitude to people belonging to various departments and institutes at UC Berkeley - particularly the Department of Sociology, the Center for Japanese Studies, and the Labor Center in the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment. My research was helped greatly by them. Above all, I am very thankful to Peter Evans, Kim Voss, and Karen Orlando. Without their kindly help, I, a foreigner, could not have done the field work in what is to me a foreign country.

neither a labor union nor a worker center, is addressed and its uniqueness is analyzed. This is a community-based supportive movement for fired immigrant workers directly due to their social security number no-match, and the organization directing this movement appears to be a kind of “forum” for the solidarity of various organizations such as unions, worker centers, interfaith communities, etc. This type of organization might be noticeable as a new labor organization because it seems to have seldom, if ever, been present in other societies, at least in Japan. Lastly, after these examinations, some tasks to be done in my future research will be made explicit.

QUESTIONS ON SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM

Background

As pointed out, SMU has various features different from business unionism. First of all, I confirm some of them and illustrate some feasible questions about these features. Taking just a glimpse at SMU, some characteristics would be found out in the following items: background, subject, industry, and directionality, being just a few. Characteristics in these points will be confirmed one after another.

There seems to be no doubt that one of the backgrounds of SMU is proceeding globalization, even if it could not be necessarily asserted that globalization itself has given rise to SMU. This is because immigrant workers are becoming the more important actors, the more of whom are coming to the United States in the process of globalization. Given that globalization is initiated primarily through the strategies of capital for the efficiency of profit earning, SMU is expected to act against capital-initiated globalization because its actors are mainly the product of globalization and suffer from the neo-liberal institutions built by global capital.

Furthermore, if we take a perspective of the world-system theory, the labor movement would be expected to be one of *antisystemic movements*. Therefore, SMU, as a new trend of the labor movement, should be against globalization in such a perspective. So what is the opportunity of the labor movement against globalization? What does it mean to be “antisystemic”? These are questions which needed an answer.

Subject

As pointed out above, immigrant workers are becoming more important subjects in SMU. For immigrants, there have been many questions raised. One of these questions is directed at their social networks. These networks are related to most phases in the migration process: for example, the motivation for migration, the mediation of migration, the aid for employment and settlement, the support for living in the United States, and the like (e.g., Massey & Espinosa, 1997).

However, as is also related, the function of these networks in organizing unions has been rarely explored. It is true that immigrants are actually all the easier to organize because of their own networks, but the concrete functions in the organizing activities of labor organizations are almost unknown. Hence the following questions should be swiftly raised and answered; are the social networks among immigrant workers mobilized into labor organizations such as unions and worker centers?; if mobilized, what kinds of functions could they have in these organizations?

Industry

As is also well known, the primary field of SMU is the service industry and various kinds of occupations in this industry are targets for organizing activities. In many cases, a prior target for organizing in the labor movement has been manufacturing such as steel and automobile. However, manufacturing has been on the decline in most advanced societies with globalization, especially the relocation of production to the Global South, and this is one of reasons why the labor movement in

these societies has also been decreasing in its strength.

The relocation of production through transnational corporations resulted in the distinction of work between the North and the South - knowledge-intensive mental work in the North and labor-intensive manual labor in the South. Therefore, even if the labor movement in the North tries to forge transnational solidarity with workers in the South or cross-border organization for them, such attempts will be almost impossible because there are vehement differences between workers in both regions - in wages, working conditions, and job contents - and both types of workers have no common interests.

Nevertheless, in the service industry, jobs in both regions might be almost the same - for example, the job of security guard is just to protect private properties and it pays poorly in both regions. In fact, in the United States, a security guard job is often allocated to immigrant workers, and their wages are generally low. Furthermore, some transnational corporations run property protection businesses. If they employ security guards in both of the North and the South, would this enlarge the likelihood that both workers can lead to solidarity with each other? This could be a question on the service industry. This question could also be related to SMU, which is activated in this industry.

In addition, the growing service industry in advanced societies includes various kinds of reproductive labor such as housekeeping, home care, child care, and the like. In many cases, female immigrant workers tend to do these jobs, and the labor movement in SMU has actively been organizing these workers executing reproductive labor. This situation leads us to the following question - what kinds of relationship are there between proceeding globalization and growing reproductive labor, given that female immigrant workers are the primary agents for reproductive labor and that immigrants themselves are just a product of globalization?; what does it mean to organize workers executing reproductive labor?

Organization

As is well known, in the past, many unions in SMU were not necessarily earnest for organizational activities. In time, they have changed themselves so that they could mobilize many resources into organizing activities. So why were they able to do that? It is true that three similar characteristics - the organizational crises, the employment of activists from other social movements, and the direction of international unions - are confirmed in local unions in SMU as Voss and Sherman (2000) pointed out. But two of these characteristics do not appear to be the causes but rather the effects of organizational changes in unions at the local and national level. In short, SMU raises to us the questions of whether or not a solid organization can change itself, and, if possible, how it can.

Directionality

As related to the above, on the one hand, the fact that one of the backgrounds of SMU is proceeding globalization would force SMU to direct toward *transnational* solidarity or *transnationalism*. On the other hand, if social networks among immigrant workers would be mobilized into labor organizations, community-based or local organizational activities should be done as well. In a word, SMU has to orient toward two opposite directions. So do these two directionalities contradict with each other? If not so, what method can resolve such a contradiction?

In the examples cited above we have confirmed some features of SMU and raised some questions out of them. In the following section, we will address two questions and examine them on the basis of findings from my field work. One is on subject - to what extent are social networks among immigrants mobilized into labor organizations through organizing activities and how are they mobilized? The other is on directionality - how does one implement community-based organizing activities particularly by a labor NPO? We will begin with the first one.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR IMMIGRANTS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Research

I will begin here by confirming the outline of my field work. As was mentioned, my research was done primarily during my stay at UC Berkeley,² and it is scheduled to be continued and finished in three years.³ The main aim of this research is to clarify the real status of organizational activities for immigrant workers on the basis of communities or at the local level. The method of this research is to have interviews with organizers working with various labor organizations such as local unions, worker centers, and other labor NPOs. The questionnaires in these interviews were structured to some degree, but the interviews themselves were basically open-ended. The organizers⁴ whom I contacted were selected through so-called snowball-sampling.⁵

As a result, all in all, I was able to have interviews with fourteen organizers - as of the date of the interviews, eight of them belonged to local unions, four were working with worker centers, and two were among a labor NPO.⁶ Regarding the type of organizations, I got in touch with six local unions, three worker centers, and one labor NPO. Furthermore, I was able to interview *leaders* belonging to two local unions. In the following, we will pick up some cases from my contacted organizations and examine, first, the activities of two local unions and, second, those of a worker center.

The Informant Profiles

I was able to contact six local unions, and among these cases I will take here three ones primarily because of the relative closeness of the interviews. In this section, first of all, I will pick up the local A of the Service Employees International Unions (SEIU).⁷ Among the targets that local A has been seeking to organize are home care workers. I had interviews with two organizers⁸ and two leaders. Second, I will take two local unions - local B and local C⁹ - of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees—Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (UNITE - HERE). And lastly, a worker center will be examined.

² Even though I stayed in Berkeley from April in 2006 to August in 2007, the period during which I could actually do my field work was from March in 2007 to August in 2007.

³ In fact, this paper also includes some findings coming from the research performed from July through August 2008.

⁴ By “organizers” I mean people who have been engaged in organizational activities. This does not always mean that all the interviewees were organizers as one of job categories. In fact, some of them were presidents or directors in their organizations.

⁵ I was introduced to some organizers at the Labor Center of UC Berkeley. I then tried to contact them and was able to interview some of them. I was also introduced to some organizers by my interviewees. Such a process was reiterated again and again. However, because interviewees were among the personal network of my first interviewee presently working with the Labor Center, some biases may exist. Many interviewees were female in their twenties or thirties. It is to be noted that following the promise with informants, I will refer to informants anonymously, regardless of persons or organizations.

⁶ The length of interviews was about one to one and half hour. Additionally, in my 2008research, I was able to interview with three organizers of three local unions and two of a labor NPO. In addition, I also met with some leaders of various unions and worker centers. One of them - she is a leader of Local B - is most important because she let me know mobilization form of the social network of immigrants.

⁷ In 2007, the SEIU reorganized its local unions in northern California and merged many of them into two large local unions - local 521 and local 1021. As a consequence, a part of local A - the division of public sector workers - was merged into local 1021, but the other - the division of home care workers - was also consolidated into local 6434. In short, an organizer and leaders now belong to local 6434.

⁸ Strictly speaking, one of them is a former organizer of local A and now working with the Labor Center at UC Berkeley as a labor specialist.

⁹ Local B is located in Oakland in the East Bay and local C is in San Francisco.

Local A Regarding the situation of their local unions, according to their talks, local A organizes about 10,000 home care workers in Alameda County,¹⁰ where about fifteen thousand home care workers are thought to be present. As of the interview date, they had two organizers with their local - one of them was Chinese¹¹ organizing Chinese home care workers and the other was for African Americans. There was no organizer for Latino workers.¹²

In addition to low wage and precarious employment, as they told me, home care workers are faced with many problems: irregular and long working hours for caring plural consumers because of low wages; no protection provision such as health insurance, overtime pay, and holiday allowance; arrogant consumers who request workers to give the increase of income to them.

As is well known (e.g., Delp & Quan, 2002), through the organizational activities for home care workers (in-house supportive service workers, IHSS workers), it was pursued to define both parties of industrial relations - the employer is the state of California and home care workers are not employed by elderly persons, who are consumers or care-takers, but the state itself. In other words, one of the main purposes was to *institutionalize* the industrial relations of the IHSS.

Local B and Local C According to those interviewed, local B has 2,300 members and a staff of five¹³ to organize workers. The ethnic composition of membership of local B is as follows - Latino are about 75%, Chinese are about 25%, and other ethnic members are not so many but also present. Local C has 10,000 members and three organizers for hotel workers.¹⁴ They have 8,000 members in their hotel divisions, and most of the rest members belong to the division of restaurants and ballpark workers. Two-thirds of members of local C are immigrant workers, each 50% of which are Latino and Asians.¹⁵ Local C had already organized 90% of so-called *A class* hotels in San Francisco.

Worker Center D Worker center D was originally established in 1972 and officially identified with a worker center in 2001. This worker center specifically seeks to organize Chinese immigrant workers in the Chinatown of San Francisco.¹⁶ It has twelve paid staff members and ten volunteers, and the number of its organized members is incessantly variable around two hundred. Its funding depends on private foundations (50%), local government foundations (40%), and its membership dues (10%).¹⁷ For its activities, this center has four main programs except for organizing workers: the Chinatown Justice Program,¹⁸ the Immigrant Empowerment Program for Health and Environment,

¹⁰ Alameda County is located in the East Bay and consists of some cities like Oakland, Emeryville, Berkeley, and so on.

¹¹ She comes from Guangzhou and can speak Cantonese. She herself had been a home care worker, and her career as an activist with the labor movement began by working as a coordinator at the home care center in Oakland.

¹² In Alameda County, the ethnic composition of home care workers is as follows: 43% of them are African American, 24% are white, 13% are Chinese, 7% are Latino, and 13% are other people of color, while, regarding that of the whole population, 15% are African American, 41% are white, 8% are Chinese, and 17% are other people of color. In a word, 76% of home care workers are among people of color, while they are 59% of the whole population in Alameda County (EBASE and UC Berkeley Labor Center, 2002).

¹³ There is a part-time staff among them.

¹⁴ Local C has seven divisions in accordance with occupations or industries. Among them are involved divisions for hotels, restaurants, cafeterias, casinos, and so on.

¹⁵ Around 50% of Asian workers are Chinese, who are increasing in number among hotel workers in San Francisco.

¹⁶ In many cases, worker centers are formed to organize specific ethnicity on the basis of its community. They are usually small organizations, and have a tendency to pursue to protect the rights of immigrants through law suits partly because they are not unions to negotiate collectively with employers. For worker centers, for example, see Fine (2006).

¹⁷ Its membership dues are \$20 a year. Nevertheless, in case of members with over four family members, they need to pay \$40 a year. It is to be noted that percentages in parentheses are what interviewees stated and are approximations.

¹⁸ This program aims at improving bad housing conditions for immigrants in the Chinatown of San Francisco.

and the Youth Organizer Program.

The Tactics for Organizing

So what kinds of tactics do these organizations execute to organize immigrant workers? For local A, the methods established during the above organizing campaign still made effect and were implemented, while the campaign had ended up succeeding. Their daily activities involved the following: the making-up of workers list,¹⁹ house visits, personal calls, and the like. Among such activities, particularly of interest to the perspective of this paper is the selection of some *leaders* for organizing their immigrant coworkers. Organizers select leaders from among rank-and-file workers on the basis of their personalities - the extent to which they are esteemed by coworkers, they can assert themselves against the employer, and so forth.

In this selection, organizers often implement some tests for the candidates of leaders - for example, they assign candidates such tasks as obtaining coworkers' phone numbers, inviting coworkers to the meetings, and so on. These selected leaders are virtually to organize their colleagues. They try to form trust with coworkers through frequent contacts by way of living in the same community.²⁰ One organizer with local A observed,²¹

Leaders let people who are in some sort of trouble know my phone number and recommend contacting the local A. Then they call me. At that time, I counsel with them in a friendly way and I can build their trust. They don't know the union so well, so they think I AM THE UNION and I can solve their problems. So I can easily organize them into the union and also mobilize them to Sacramento. I know almost all the members' names and faces. If I ask them to do me a favor by attending a meeting, they all do it and go to Sacramento even though they may be busy.

The fact that leaders are important is the same as the cases of local B and C. The president of local B said,

In each ethnic group, to select adequate leaders is critical. In the selection, we ask the coworkers which person is reliable. A couple of workers refer to the same person, and then he or she is qualified as a leader. We assign some tasks to the candidates - for example, gathering coworkers' phone numbers, bringing coworkers to the meetings, and something like that.

Leaders play a role of shop stewards and they are also leaders among the immigrant networks. So whether or not we organize network leaders as union leaders is definite in the success of organizing. For example, the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley was difficult to organize. That is because the leader among the network of Peruvians was anti-union.

In this way, leaders are *actually organizers* in their local unions. So what kinds of relationships are there between organizers and leaders? For this point, the president of local B also stated,

In the case of Double Tree Hotel in Berkeley - there are 160 employees - for the

¹⁹ Because home care workers do not work collectively, for example, at such places as factories but individually at care-takers' houses, organizers had to start by identifying where home care workers were working and then contacting them. These lists are required to be created during this process.

²⁰ In Oakland, there is also a Chinatown, where many Chinese home care workers live. These workers share their working and living area with each other.

²¹ It is to be noted that the following utterances are not necessarily transcribed exactly from their talks. They are the contents summarized from their talks.

housekeeping department, we have five leaders: one Filipino, two Chinese,²² and two Blacks. The organizer for this hotel - he is now a representative - usually contact leaders, while he sometimes contact rank-and-file workers. In this sense, leaders are actually expected to play a role of organizers. And also the president has some chances to meet with leaders, but has rarely those chances with rank-and-file workers.

An organizer of local C also said,

We now have three organizers and 300 leaders for the hotel division. In the San Francisco Marriott Campaign - it took seven years - four organizers were engaged in organizing, and each of them had thirty leaders. And each leader tried to organize twenty colleagues. Organizers chose leaders; Leaders really organized workers and information was delivered by the leaders. Organizers didn't meet directly with any workers.²³

In this way, through these interviews, it turns out that so-called leaders are important in organizing immigrants, and it also seems that leaders play significant roles in social networks among immigrants. If so, then the relationship between organizers and leaders is also critical. This is partly because the qualifications of organizers are likely to affect the extent to which they can firmly build these relationships and, as a result, grasp such social networks, given that many organizers do not have chances to meet with rank-and-file workers.

It is true that many local unions of the SEIU and the UNITE - HERE have come to employ bilingual organizers, but even if they can speak the same language that immigrants do, those organizers might not be able to share experiences with immigrants and obtain their trust.²⁴ I did not meet many organizers; many of those I did meet were not workers originally, but rather college graduates or student activists. Therefore, immigrants are not always likely to sympathize with these activists, who do not have common experiences.

As is well known, the SEIU and the UNITE - HERE seek to think much of how to consolidate immigrants into their organizations and establish caucuses and committees for various ethnicities. For example, the SEIU formed a Latino caucus and cultural committee in order to grasp the interests of Latino workers and meet their demands adequately. However, my field work - even though the findings are only tentative - at least indicates that some organizers, who should be the *representatives* of the local unions for immigrant workers,²⁵ do not necessarily make contact with rank-and-file workers

²² As was referred, one of these Chinese leaders might indicate a typical case of mobilizing social network among immigrant workers into unions. She was born in a peasant family in Taishan, China. Because they do not have enough jobs there, she came to the United States in 1989 and began to work with the Doubletree Hotel in Berkeley as a housekeeper after having several jobs. Afterwards she brought over her three sisters and one sister-in-law into the United States and helped them to get jobs in the same hotel. Two of her sisters also work as housekeepers, and the other sister and sister-in-law work in the banquet section. Presently all of her family live in the United States. Furthermore, when the union was organized in the hotel in 1998, she also joined it with her sisters. In short, she has been not only a kind of *hub* or *node* in their network but also a leader in local B. In addition, it is interesting that she has a rural background and the relationships in her network are thought to be *communitarian*.

²³ However, in smaller shops such as cafeterias, organizers can have a chance to meet with rank-and-file workers.

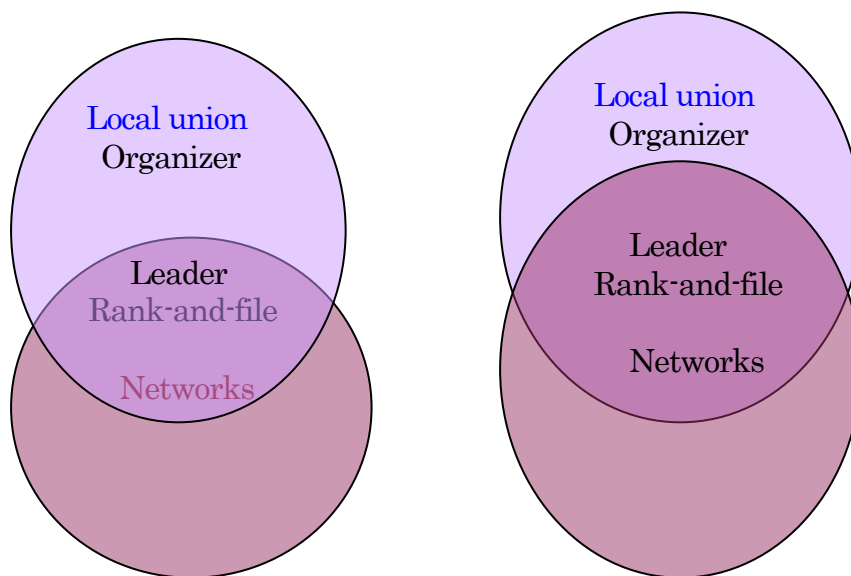
²⁴ On the contrary, the organizers that were originally immigrant workers are also likely to belong to the social networks among immigrants. These organizers might seize and control their social networks much better. Figure 1 conceptualizes this reasoning. Type A illustrates the case in which organizers do not belong to the networks, and type B does the case in which organizers are among the networks.

²⁵ Here a representative does not necessarily mean that he or she is a negotiator with employers in collective bargaining. This term only means that immigrant workers strongly associate him or her with the image of union

on the daily basis. If so, organizers could not make sense of the real situations of immigrant workers and get access to their social networks well.

To put it another way, the social networks have their own *autonomy*, which not only organizers but also local unions themselves are unfamiliar with. Given that many local unions organize various ethnic groups and some conflicts are often present between them,²⁶ the autonomy of the social networks among each ethnic group affects union organizations negatively if local unions cannot control such autonomy.²⁷

Figure 1. Organizers and Networks
Type A Type B



In the above, we examined the cases of local unions. So what about a worker center? Worker center D had organized unemployed workers in manufacturing such as electronics. This is because the beginning of worker center D derived from consulting with dismissed female workers and implementing a back wage campaign for them through a law suit. Therefore, as an organizer said, at least in the beginning, worker center D was passive in organizing activities.

However, reflecting on such passivity, worker center D has got more active in organizing with a main target at restaurant workers in Chinatown. They did research on the situations of workers in the Chinatown, and, as a consequence, it turned out that many restaurant workers, who had just arrived in the United States from China, were working below the minimum wage and under bad conditions.²⁸

itself.

²⁶ The president of local B told me that the conflicts between ethnic groups were always present, particularly between Blacks and Asians, because they cannot communicate with each other by the common language. She also stated that local B was always trying to evade conflicts through seeking common interests against employers.

²⁷ For example, as a former organizer of local A put it, the conflict between ethnic groups had realized itself in the election of board members - the board consisted of seven members and anyone could be a candidate, but some ethnic groups tended to be opposed to a candidate of different ethnicity and, as a result, this candidate could not be confided.

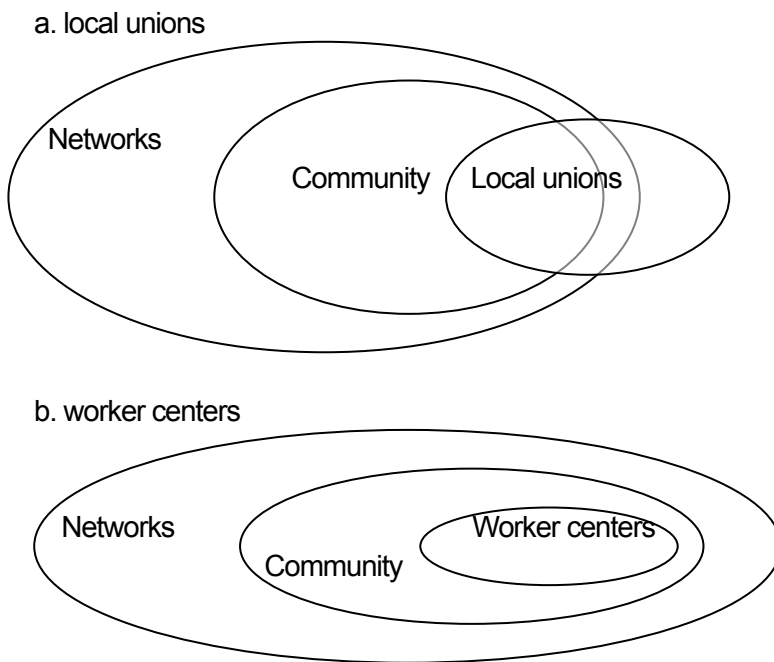
²⁸ During my research in 2008, it is found that worker center D was trying to do research on the health conditions of restaurant workers in Chinatown, collaborating with some scholars. The purpose of this research is to clarify the

Worker center D does not only seek to organize such workers and execute a minimum wage campaign, but also *foster leaders* among immigrant workers enthusiastically. As is told, they have a leadership development program,²⁹ and this program takes six weeks to finish - its curriculum includes the topics on the status quo of the world and immigrants, the history of immigrants, the politics in the United States, the skills of organization, and the like.

What kinds of persons are these leaders? For the leaders in manufacturing, they are almost female, in their forties and fifties, low-educated, and they can rarely speak English. But the leaders in restaurant workers are different from those in manufacturing. The gender composition of the latter is 50-50, and they can speak English. The restaurant worker leaders, who are in their late twenties and thirties, are also doing various jobs.

An organizer of worker center D told me that his organization was just a community-based one on the basis of cultural activism³⁰ and that it did not necessarily organize many workers. As he said, it has good terms with local unions and the labor council in San Francisco, but few of its members join other unions.

Figure 2. Immigrant Networks and Labor Organizations



Discussion

In the preceding, my research findings have been reviewed. Now I will confirm them again by

poor working conditions of restaurant workers and demand the enforcement of improvement to the city of San Francisco. Furthermore, it is remarkable that the members of worker center D - who are also young Chinese immigrants - will be appointed researchers and that this research itself is regarded as a training for fostering leaders. By meeting with many workers and interviewing them, researchers will be expected to not only learn the situations of workers and the skills for negotiations but also become independent as *subjects*.

²⁹ It is to be noted that worker centers do not only have a leadership development program but also other local unions. Nevertheless, as far as my research indicates, it seems that a worker center is more eager to build such a program and implement it than a union. This might derive from the fact that worker centers can seize the situations of immigrant workers partly because of their small membership and can easily train their members.

³⁰ This phrase reminds us of Maoism. Worker center D seems to have been influenced by Maoism.

making a couple of considerations. First, it turned out that organizers did not organize rank-and-file workers directly in the organizational process but rather the leaders did, and that these leaders actually organized rank-and-file workers in many unions. Second, leaders seem to be the *nodes* of the social networks among immigrants and utilize the networks in organizing activities. Third, the qualifications of organizers could affect the extent to which unions can seize the social networks among immigrant workers. The organizers that were originally workers in these same jobs that they now were organizing for could understand better the situations and interests of rank-and-file workers.

And last, there seems to be differences between labor organizations in the relationship with social networks among immigrants. While social networks among immigrants spread over the world and each immigrant community in various societies is somewhat integrated within these networks, labor organizations such as local unions and worker centers are also located somewhere in such disposition.

On the one hand, given that worker centers only organize workers in specific ethnic groups and that they are community-based organizations, they are *endogenous* organizations, that is, a *complete* part of a community and networks. On the other hand, local unions seem to be *exogenous* organizations, which are *partly* a part of a community and networks,³¹ even though they could intrude into a community and networks. In case local unions can only employ organizers unfamiliar with the circumstances and jobs of immigrant workers, their organizational nature gets stronger. Figure 2 conceptualizes this discussion.

THE COMMUNITY-BASED LABOR MOVEMENT BY AN NPO

The Labor Movement of an NPO

Next I will examine the community-based labor movement executed by a labor NGO.

NPO E NPO E was established as the research unit of local B in 1999. It started with only two staff members and had its office located in local B. Now it has fifteen paid staff members and consists of three groups: community benefit group, research group, and organizing group. Regarding its fund, NPO E primarily depends on many foundations and donations—90% of its fund derives from foundations.

It has earned various benefits for people living in the East Bay; it won the enforcement of living wage³² in six cities such as Richmond and Oakland; it joined the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride Campaign³³ in 2003 and played a central role in the northern California. Presently, NPO E has been focused on several campaigns such as the Port Driver Campaign,³⁴ the Tax Revenue Campaign,³⁵

³¹ This results in the fact that worker centers seems to *develop* their leaders rather than *select* them, or select their leaders *after* organizing rather than do *in* organizing. This is because a worker center, which is a small organization rooted in an ethnic community, can recognize many workers and is also required to train them due to their low education.

³² Living wage could be defined as the wage for an average family enough to live a healthy and decent life. Living wage has been enforced in many cities in the United States. For example, it was enforced in Oakland in 1998. As of June in 2007, living wage was defined hourly to be \$10.07 (<http://www.livingwagecampaign.org/index.php?id=1959>).

³³ This campaign emulated the Freedom Ride Campaign in the Civil Rights Movement and pursued the protection and expansion of immigrant rights. In this campaign, from primary western cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle to Washington D.C., activists riding on buses went around various cities asserting the expansion of their rights, and also further activists joined the buses in these cities. They all finally rushed to Washington D.C. and appealed for the immigrant rights.

³⁴ This campaign has sought to render employers confirm that the truck drivers in the Port of Oakland are not self-employed but workers. These truck drivers have not been given any protection for workers because they are regarded as self-employed with their own trucks. This campaign has been implemented in association with the Teamsters.

and the Woodfin Hotel Campaign. Next we will closely examine the Woodfin Hotel Campaign.

The Woodfin Hotel Campaign

The background of this campaign originated from the enforcement of *Measure C*, which is a legislation of the City of Emeryville in December 2005. The Measure C enforced that the hotels in Emeryville with over fifty accommodations should pay their employees a minimum of \$9 per hour, \$11 per hour on the average and give them other benefits such as overtime pay and paid leave. As a result, three hotels in Emeryville - they are qualified for the Measure C but have not complied with it after its enforcement - paid their employees back wages.

Nevertheless, only the Woodfin Hotel did not comply with the Measure C as of October 2006. Therefore, employees of the Woodfin Hotel brought a suit against the hotel demanding a total of \$160,000 for back wages. Afterwards, the hotel dismissed twenty-one employees, accusing them of violating the law because of the Social Security Number no-match.³⁶ In many cases, employers do not usually care whether or not immigrant workers that they employ are undocumented. Therefore, this dismissal seemed to be a reprisal for the lawsuit.

Because all immigrants have basic civil rights provided by the Constitution and its Amendments, the dismissal of these workers was suspended by the court, and the boycott campaign for the hotel was coordinated and started by NPO E. Picketing has been practiced almost every Tuesday evening and Saturday morning. Various organizations associate with NPO E for this boycott campaign - local unions, worker centers, interfaith organizations,³⁷ and so forth. In other words, NPO E is a kind of *forum* where various pro-labor organizations forge solidarity with each other. The boycott campaign is still in progress, because the Woodfin Hotel has not yet agreed to the rule of the city council of Emeryville in August 2007 that it should comply with the Measure C and pay back wages.

Uniqueness and Questions

The labor movement of NPO E seems to have some uniqueness. In the following, I will make them explicit. First, it is a labor movement of an NPO. This style of labor movement almost does not exist.³⁸ It is neither implemented through unions nor worker centers, but through the third type of labor organization. This type of organization, a labor NPO seems to be an associational *forum* of community-based organizations.³⁹

Second, NPO E started as a research unit of local B, that is, the UNITE - HERE. Reflecting on the Woodfin Hotel Campaign, local B did not strangely organize these workers directly. NPO E

³⁵ This campaign has tried to suggest that municipalities should make use of their tax revenues in order to decrease low-wage workers. In short, its aim is to make a policy suggestion.

³⁶ The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a proposed rule for the Social Security Administration No-match Letters in August 2007. While asked to submit their SSN in getting jobs, undocumented workers, who cannot obtain their official SSN, have to submit false numbers.

³⁷ In many cases, interfaith organizations are based on some church. People joining these organizations are supporting undocumented immigrant workers, predicated on their religious faith that the injustice for the weak cannot be allowed and that all the people should have the same rights regardless of their race and ethnicity.

³⁸ This is the case at least in Japan.

³⁹ For this point, NPO E seems to make it easier to mobilize interfaith committees into the labor movement. Interfaith committees consist of some religious leaders such as priests and rabbis from various sects, and these leaders hold their congregations. In short, they talk about labor problems in their congregations and mobilize their members into various campaigns. However, some members often dislike some kind of antagonism characteristic of the labor movement. Therefore, such an organization as NPO E could associate them with unions and easily invite them to the labor movement. Indeed, NPO E executed a big march in Oakland by coordinating the Teamster union, community organizations, and an interfaith committee in June 2008. This was done for both of the improvement of working conditions of truck drivers in the Port of Oakland and the protection of environment in the region.

coordinated the campaign instead. It may be that there is a division of labor in the labor movement and that the scarce resources for organizing activities are more efficiently used through it. However, it also seems that NPO E is only a branch of local B or its subcontractor. In short, the relationships between NPOs of this type and local unions would need to be rendered more explicit.

Third, related to the above, it is interesting that NPO E does not have its specific membership. It is true that it employs some organizers and organizes workers, but it does not have its own members. This seems to mean that the movement of NPO E is specialized in supporting other organizations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this short and tentative report, I addressed the labor movement in the San Francisco Bay Area and mainly examined the organizational activities for immigrants - particularly focused on mobilizing their social networks into labor organizations such as local unions and worker centers - and the community-based movement by a labor NPO. As a result, I obtained the following findings.

First, in case of local unions, actual organizing subjects are *leaders*, and they appear to be the *nodes* of the social networks among immigrants. Second, the extent to which local unions can mobilize the networks depend on the qualifications of organizers of the unions, that is, the relationships between the organizers and the social networks. Third, when comparing the relationship with the social networks or their places in the constellation of labor organizations, communities, and the networks, local unions are different from worker centers. Fourth, the community-based labor movement by a NPO seems to provide a *forum* where various organizations such as local unions, worker centers, interfaith organizations, etc. associate with each other and to enable different organizations to build solidarity.

However, these tentative findings require that further research should be done on the following points. First, it should be clarified what kinds of person leaders are. This research could clarify that leaders connect some relationships with other immigrant coworkers. Nevertheless, the nature of these relationships has not yet been explicit. In order to seize such nature, many a question will need to be answered. Are these relationships the same as those mobilized in the job-seeking process?⁴⁰ Are leaders the *hubs*⁴¹ of the networks?

Second, various differences in the mobilization of the networks would need to be clarified in comparison - organizations, ethnicities, industries, and regions. Are there any differences between local unions? Are Chinese the same as Latino in the nature of their networks? Is the style of mobilization different between industries such as home care, hotels, and restaurants? And lastly, to what extent does the labor movement in the San Francisco Bay Area have uniqueness? For example, is it different from that in the region of Los Angeles? If so, what kinds of differences are there?

Third, the relationship between the community-based labor movement and the transnational activities of unions needs to be examined. As related, the social networks of immigrants are spread

⁴⁰ For example, Waldinger & Lichter (2003) insisted that the job-seeking process of immigrants should be mediated with their social networks. Mediators, who got their jobs in workplaces earlier than others, would give some information to newcomers and introduce them to their employer. It also seems to be necessary that whether or not these relationships mediating job-seeking are the same as those mobilized in the organizational activities should be clarified. If these relationships are the same, there seems to be some contradiction—for example, while the mediators for job-seeking have to get along with their managers, they can be also against their managers when they organize their coworkers into unions.

⁴¹ Based on the research on Caribbean immigrants, Bashi (2007) defined the *nodes* of the social networks among immigrants as *hubs*. They are centers with *spokes*, which mean relationships in the networks, or people supported through the aid of *hubs*. In many phases of life, hubs support spokes, who are often their relatives or friends, and, on the contrary, spokes reward hubs in various ways. Their relationships, that is, networks themselves are reciprocal.

over the world beyond national boundaries. So how are local movements associated with transnational activities? What kinds of activity or organization could be mediated between the two?⁴²

In this way, these further questions will have to be answered on the basis of additional field work.

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⁴² Related to this point, it seems to be interesting what kinds of function hometown associations (HTAs) have in organizing immigrants. HTAs are the local associations of Mexican immigrants originating from the same village and related to the original village through the donation to its development. And also they are *transnational* organizations, given that their constituent immigrants so often go back and forth to Mexico. As of now, it is not necessarily reported that HTAs can really help in the organizational activities for immigrants. Nevertheless, because they are just networks, HTAs could play remarkable roles in organizing immigrants if some conditions are provided. In that case, they could function as a medium of the *local* and the *global* and, as a result, be *transnational*. For hometown associations, see also Zabin & Rabadan (1998).