



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Asian immigrant garment workers campaign for economic justice, San Francisco, USA, 1992-1996

September

1992

to: March

1996

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *San Francisco, California*

Goals:

Expanded garment workers rights, pay compensation

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 010. Newspapers and journals › Ad campaign
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 071. Consumers' boycott
- 072. Nonconsumption of boycotted goods

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 071. Consumers' boycott
- 072. Nonconsumption of boycotted goods

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 013. Deputations

Notes on Methods:

Methods used in segments 3-5 are not known, but it is likely that some action took place during that period to continue pressuring the opponent.

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Asian immigrant women

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

AIWA (Asian Immigrant Workers Advocates)

Partners:

Korean American United Students for Action (KAUSES), Concerned Asian Pacific Students for Action (CAPSA), Public Media Center, Koreatown Immigrant Workers Association (KIWA)

External allies:

College students (mainly UC Berkeley)

Involvement of social elites:

US Labor Secretary Robert Reich

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- AIWA
- CAPSA
- College students
- KAUSES
- KIWA
- Public Media Center

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- US Labor Secretary Robert Reich

Segment Length: 7 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Jessica McClintock Inc., Lucky Sewing Co.

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Counter advertisements

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

When the San Francisco Bay based Lucky Sewing Co. filed for bankruptcy in May of 1992, they laid off twelve Chinese immigrant women whom they owed \$15,000 in back wages. The company's attorney claimed that they had few assets and there was no money to pay the seamstresses. Lucky Sewing Co. and other garment contractors imposed terrible conditions on workers who were often paid less than the \$4.25 minimum wage. When the twelve women saw their handiwork for which they were paid \$5 on Jessica McClintock dresses sold for \$175, they aligned themselves with the Asian Immigrant Workers Advocates (AIWA) to fight for justice.

On September 29, 1992, AIWA sent a letter to Jessica McClintock Inc. asking for reimbursement for the seamstresses' wages, as well as a two-year independent contract with them. Two days later, a fax reply answered no. McClintock stated that she had no control over the contractor's dealings and was therefore exempt from responsibility by California law. AIWA contacted the nonprofit Public Media Center to draw up an ad campaign to focus public attention on the issue. Several weeks later, they ran a full page spread under the title "Let Them Eat Lace" in the New York Times, contrasting images of McClintock's dresses with pictures of seamstresses bent over sewing machines. McClintock responded with an ad of her own, claiming AIWA's tactics were "intimidation" and that she was not to blame.

Beginning in November, AIWA called for boycotts of McClintock stores as well as those that carried her designs such as Macy's and Nordstrom's. On Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving, a huge shopping day in the U.S.A.), the twelve seamstresses sparked national protests for worker rights in ten cities. The picketing continued in Beverly Hills where protesters created an almost constant presence on the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Rodeo Drive, chanting, marching, carrying banners and donated McClintock dresses on flagpoles and handing out leaflets to passers-by. The Superior Court issued a partial

injunction limiting the number of protesters within a certain distance of McClintock's store. In backlash, the number of protesters doubled and the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Association (KIWA), the UC Berkeley chapters of the Korean American United Students for Action (KAUSES) and the Concerned Asian Pacific Students for Action (CAPSA) joined the cause, expanding the protest issue to immigrant worker rights. McClintock retaliated by buying the silence of 5 of the 12 women and hiring Asian women as models and salespeople.

On December 2, AIWA released another ad, this one containing a letter from former McClintock executive Eleanor Dugan in support of the workers. Each advertisement had printed coupons at the bottom, asking for financial and symbolic backing. Supporters sent in over 1000 coupons as well as dozens of letters and postcards to both AIWA and McClintock directly. AIWA also marched to McClintock's home in San Francisco

AIWA sponsored a hearing on May 1, 1993, International Workers Day, in which they demanded legislation holding manufacturers, as well as contractors, responsible for the pay and conditions of workers. Current legislation simply increased fines for violations of worker rights.

The Department of Labor released a list of "Fair Labor Fashions Trendsetters" in the fall of 1995. They cited companies who upheld worker protection standards. Jessica McClintock was included on the list. AIWA pointed out the discrepancy between McClintock's words and actions to the Department of Labor. Rather than be taken off the list and subjected to more bad publicity, McClintock gave in.

In March of 1996, AIWA and Jessica McClintock signed an agreement mediated by US Labor Secretary Robert Reich. In the settlement AIWA won a garment workers education fund, money for a workers' union and scholarships for students and workers. Under the agreement, McClintock Inc. had to clearly print labor standards bilingually and set up toll-free hotlines monitored by the Department of Labor for workers to report sub-par conditions.

Research Notes

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Additional Notes:

Edited by Max Rennebohm (28/07/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Rebecca Contreras, 10/02/2011

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