



Fighting Shutdowns in Sunny California

<http://www.firstlight.cn> 2010-07-19

[Excerpt] Contrary to the belief that only the Northeast is suffering as the sun-belt expands, California is being wracked by severe economic upheavals. High levels of unemployment persist in many areas of the state, fed by a constant stream of closures and layoffs in all sectors of the economy. Between 1981 and 1983 over 1,000 California firms closed permanently, and more than 165,000 jobs were lost. Another 414,000 workers lost their jobs as the ripple effect hit suppliers and small businesses.

In response to the growing number of plant closings, local coalitions have formed throughout California, including major industrial unions, churches, and diverse community organizations. These coalitions have developed a variety of responses to closures: organizing to force corporate responsibility in dealing with workers; finding ways to keep plants open by using worker buyouts or product diversification; pushing for legislation; promoting military conversion, and increasing labor-community input into economic planning.

Whether in a legislative fight or a local response to save jobs in one plant, the California coalitions demonstrate that workers faced with plant closures are not helpless, that workers, unions and communities can fight the economic upheavals they face.

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