

Collective Bargaining in the NYC Garment Industry

Presentation by

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Local 23-25 Workers United

Industrial Revolution in New York's Apparel Industry

1909 Uprising of 20,000

- Immigrant women sewing workers
- Mass meeting inspires 3/8 Int'l Women's Day
- Long winter pickets
- Shops settle individually
- Fight for Union Shop

1910 Cloakmakers Strike

- General strike for industry standards
- Protocols of Peace lead to collective bargaining
- Union must represent and serve the workers and enforce standards

New Industrial Relations after 1911 Triangle Factory Fire

- Government leaders pressed the garment industry employers to make peace with the workers and union.
- Factory Investigating Commission formed
- FDR's New Deal established a social contract between workers and employers.
- Employers formed associations to negotiate with the union.

Garment Industry Contracts

- Bargaining Unit = production workers
- Association contracts for Manufacturers
- Association contracts for Contractors
- Common standards established for industrial segments (coats, dresses, sportswear...) and geographical areas

Typical Contract Provisions

- Three-year term, renewed every 3 years
- Wages and wage increases, hours and overtime
- Holidays and benefits – health, pension
- Dispute resolution system
- Manufacturer-contractor relations, rules for sourcing of work

1982 NY Chinatown Strike

- photo

Chinese immigrant workers

- Chinese women immigrated in large numbers after U.S. immigration law changes in 1965
- They went to work immediately in the garment factories which were union shops
- There was a system of union shop representatives and piecework negotiations in the shops.

Factory Conditions

- “Hours were long and pay was low. Wages were calculated by piece rate.... The most effective way of getting the boss to increase our piece rate was to all stop working until a fair price was negotiated.”

Chinatown Employers

- Contractors for brand name manufacturers
- Most manufacturers were unionized, so the contractors had to be union.
- With the start of globalization, the prices offered by the manufacturers were decreasing.
- Chinese contractors refused to renew the union contract unless workers agreed to reduced wages and benefits.

Mobilizing the Workers

- The Chinese contractors/bosses thought the Chinese workers would support them against the union.
- The union had to mobilize the workers to pressure the contractors to sign the new contract.
- Workers understood their rights and benefits would be protected by the union.

Strike Activities

- Some employers locked out the workers.
- Union set up telephone calls and leaflets to reach members.
- “We Are One” union rally of 20,000 on June 24, 1982.
- June 29 rally, march, and shop strikes.
- Contract resolved

Union Activism after 1982

- Labor education for Chinese union members, especially shop representatives
- Educational and Cultural programs – Chinese chorus, classes, trips
- Leadership development
- Labor community programs – day care, senior services ...
- Employer & community cooperation

Challenges

- Outsourcing and globalization, industry changes
- Increasing employer opposition, increase of non-union shops
- New immigrant workers need to be educated about the union
- Government indifference and opposition to labor unions
- Disintegration of social contract among labor, management, government

Solidarity Forever!

- American labor movement is mobilizing to defend the right to organize and bargain collectively in the US.
- Worker movements growing all over the world – for better wages & conditions, the right to organize and bargain collectively.
- Global solidarity unites all workers to demand fairness from global corporations.