

CHAPTER 3

"Big Jobs to Do"

Economic Security, Electoral Politics,
and Civil Rights Liberalism

Regino González and his family greeted the 1940s in a rental home in the Excelsior District, along Bayshore Boulevard, where they eked out a living built around a household economy. Born in Puerto Rico, Regino and his wife, Cristina, arrived in San Francisco in the early 1910s and raised six children in California. The Gonzalezes relied on the unpaid domestic labors of Cristina and younger children as well as multiple incomes earned at a furniture factory. Regino, oldest son, Paul, nephew Rafael, and daughter Grace worked as a finisher, upholsterers, and a panel maker, respectively. Furniture making was literally a family affair.¹

The union representing Gonzalez and his kinfolk—the UFW Local 262—expanded its base at mid-century and tenaciously exercised its political brawn. A wartime ethos of harmonious labor relations translated into no-strike pledges and employer acquiescence to upgrade union agreements. In October 1942, the UFW's negotiations with the Simmons Bed Company afforded workers the most robust contract to date. Gains included a \$2 per week bonus, a 2 percent Christmas bonus, and increased vacation time. Adhering to its cornerstone of industrial unionism, the union also pursued wage parity and demanded a "guaranteed \$1 an hour rate" irrespective of job skill.² This climate of mutual concession, however, broke down once the war ended. In February 1946, the UFW found itself back on the picket line. Following various months of negotiations, Edelmiro Huertas and Rogelio Herrera joined some seven hundred fellow Simmons Company workers and struck for higher wages. The 1 percent increase as offered by management, unionists

insisted, was not "a decent offer" and did not signal an auspicious postwar future.³

While economic prosperity governed unions' ambitions, working-class Latinos increasingly reckoned their labor organizations could also assist them beyond the workplace. Huertas and other unionists who belonged to the Puerto Rican Club confirmed such aspirations in 1946. That year, the three-decades-old social club, now based in the Excelsior District, encountered a tide of hostility and harassment, prompting group leaders to ask the San Francisco CIO (SFCIO) Council for guidance and support. This council functioned as the coordinating body of all local unions affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Turning to the council proved logical as the club drew many members from CIO unions, including the locals representing longshoremen, warehousemen, scalers, and furniture workers.

The Puerto Rican Club's troubles became apparent that summer when its events, especially its dances, generated consternation and antipathy among district residents and police authorities alike. Neighbors complained about the noise produced by live entertainment and the "rowdiness" from crowds attending the club's festivities. Police authorities' official response followed the standard protocol for handling such matters: they asked the club to be mindful of neighbors' concerns and to lessen the music's volume. Acknowledging the liveliness of their festivities, club leaders stressed that their dances occurred on Saturday nights and ended by midnight. In addition, they underscored the club's policies of only selling beer, prohibiting all forms of disorderly conduct, and monitoring "the premises so as to keep out undesirable" guests. These assurances and policies did not appear to be enough, at least not for the police department.⁴

Police authorities soon made known their views about Puerto Ricans: they saw them as troublesome, unwelcome, and nonwhite. Standard protocol gave way to increased surveillance, verbal aggravation, and intimidation. Police officers routinely attended and patrolled the dances, nagged club leaders about noise levels and crowd control, and sometimes commented on a desire to halt the events altogether. On one occasion, a sergeant purportedly told a club officer, "This is a residential district and it is not supposed to be open to Niggers and Pachucos."⁵ The term *pachuco* gained prominence in 1940s California as a referent for Mexican Americans involved in or suspected of participating in youth gang activities.⁶ Applying this label alongside the racist epithet used for African Americans at once referenced Puerto Ricans' multiracial composition and pointed to their racial unintelligibility.

Law enforcement agents maneuvered their misrecognition by positioning Puerto Ricans as both black and Mexican or at least comparable to those other racialized populations.

The SFCIO Council's executive officers confirmed what club leaders probably surmised: the predicament did not stem from noise but from race. Enlisted in the unions most committed to ending racial discrimination, the club's members likely understood that their problems revolved around tensions over fair housing, concerns over Puerto Ricans' suitability as neighbors, and police harassment of racial minorities. The quandary led the council to ask the mayor and chief of police to intervene in the matter. "[We] appeal to you to put a stop to the improper behaviour of the police," wrote Paul Schnur, the body's secretary. The labor alliance concurrently urged city leaders to "prevent the city administration from lending its weight to . . . a species of persecution based upon racial considerations."

Though surviving evidence does not reveal if city officials attended to the situation, the case exposed pivotal layers of Latinos' life circumstances at mid-century. Increased migration during the war years and the postwar decades led some Latinos to neighborhoods with a long-standing Latino presence; others turned to new areas of settlement because of shrinking housing options in such districts as North Beach, density concerns, and a penchant for more pastoral spaces. But if employers availed themselves of Latinos as laborers, some San Franciscans did not accept them as neighbors and social equals. The phenomenon was not specific to the city, and Latinos faced analogous conditions in other urban centers at the time.⁸ This is not to say that inequity and bias were absent from the employment arena. Eradicating racial inequality in the workplace, in fact, stood at the center of civil rights organizing throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Such activity formed part of the unions' agendas—especially the CIO affiliates—for economic stability and civic advancement. During these decades, the labor movement remained the pivotal force urging an enhancement of San Franciscans' quality of life. Latino unionists who belonged to the Puerto Rican Club and other such organizations recognized this fact; they therefore turned to their unions to shore up their rights as workers and citizens.

Deeply immersed in labor's sphere, Latinos' political praxis in the mid-twentieth century exhibited continuity, amplification, and disruption. The unionization impulse broadened, and the pursuit of economic security guided the programs of experienced and nascent unionists alike. Seasoned organizations, such as the Ship Scalers Union, and budding outfits, such as

the Tortilla Makers Union, pressed for higher wages, overtime pay, holiday and vacation leaves, and hazard-free work settings.⁹ Union members also set out to reinforce their New Deal protections and to defend the inviolability of the closed shop in times of armed conflict and cold war. They did so through direct action and heightened attention to both electoral and legislative processes. Latinos had occasionally engaged with the formal political arena in decades past; their unions now regularly rallied them to vote, to back pro-labor candidates, and to push for public policy initiatives of keen concern to them.

The decade-long campaign to pass a fair employment practices (FEP) statute epitomized labor unions' fusion of grassroots organizing and policy work. Partnering with other racial minorities and white allies, Latinos embraced and championed civil rights liberalism. Proponents of this "racial paradigm," as one historian has called it, consistently urged political and business leaders to actualize the tenets of equal opportunity, colorblindness, and equal protection of the law.¹⁰ San Francisco's enactment of an FEP ordinance in 1957 codified this vision into law and testified to an upswing in local government's assurance of equality. The ascendancy of civil rights liberalism, however, occurred as the labor movement increasingly found itself on the defensive. Jurisdictional raids and anticommunist attacks on progressive unions that welcomed Latinos and other racial minorities accelerated during the early postwar years. And by the end of the 1950s, organized labor confronted a statewide movement aiming to invalidate the closed shop and institute right-to-work policies. Latino unionists and their comrades fought strenuously against these assaults. In so doing, they weathered a mixed political climate, navigating gains and losses, progress and morass.

Migration and Neighborhood Transition at Mid-Century

Born in Walsenburg, Colorado, just fifty miles north of the New Mexico border, seventeen-year-old Bertha Castro headed to San Francisco in late 1942. Her sister Anna had arrived earlier and held a job at Reliance Trailer and Truck Company, which manufactured industrial tractors used heavily by waterfront companies. Bertha first worked as a salesgirl and then a waitress; by February 1943, she had procured a position as an assembler/helper at Reliance. Both siblings also became members of the Automotive Machinist Union Local 1305 of the International Association of Machinists.¹¹ Their

trajectory was not an exceptional one. Finding wartime work and joining the ranks of organized labor proved to be a common experience for many Latinos who entered the city in the 1940s.

A booming labor market, workforce shortages, and the economic might of defense industries across the Bay Area spurred a new wave of Latino migration during the war years and the decade that followed. An expanded economy marked by soaring business activity and increased levels of employment in manufacturing, construction, and transportation (sectors that all grew by 50 percent or more) triggered what some scholars have labeled as the second gold rush to Northern California.¹² Thousands of domestic and international migrants came to the region to better their economic standing. San Francisco's overall population rose by more than 20 percent in ten years alone, from approximately 634,535 residents in 1940 to roughly 775,360 city dwellers by 1950. The number of Latinos almost doubled during this decade, from more than 14,000 in 1940 to approximately 24,000 by 1950.¹³ Though still a small part of the general population, Latinos' cumulative growth foreshadowed a demographic trend in motion: their numbers would double again by 1960 and once more by 1970.

Ethnic Mexicans remained the most numerous Latino subgroup in the 1940s. Numbers alone obscured a heterogeneity marked by distinctions in residential history, birthplace, generation, and citizenship. In 1940, census enumerators determined that approximately half of the city's Mexican-origin residents had been born in the United States. This figure only accounted for native-born Mexican Americans with at least one immigrant parent.¹⁴ Other U.S.-born residents who clung to their cultural heritage included those "descendants of the original inhabitants of California, Texas, and New Mexico."¹⁵ In fact, domestic migrants like the Castro sisters from Colorado regularly left various southwestern localities in search of work opportunities in San Francisco. They were joined by immigrants who entered directly from Mexico. Still others first spent time as farm laborers or railroad workers—sometimes participating in a contract labor effort known as the Bracero program—before arriving in the city.¹⁶

Marked diversification among ethnic Mexicans coincided with a steady inflow of Central Americans. The 1940s actually became a transitional decade of outmigration from the isthmus, as well as the demographic configuration of the city's overall Latino population. By the decade's end, Central American immigrants began to outnumber Mexican immigrants.¹⁷ While the city presented one of many settlement options for Mexican nationals, Central

Americans remained overwhelmingly concentrated in San Francisco. A quest for better economic opportunities coupled with social ties to individuals who had arrived in decades past inspired more and more Nicaraguans and Salvadorans to migrate. Some migrants learned about jobs from family and friends; others did so by coming into contact with labor agents—especially ones representing shipyard companies—who "recruited workers from Nicaragua and El Salvador."¹⁸ Julio Andrade formed part of this movement. Decades later, he recalled that many in 1940s El Salvador "wanted to come to work painting ships in San Francisco." Doing so led many of them into the ranks of organized labor. By 1944, the SSU acknowledged the presence of Central Americans and identified them as one of the minority groups it represented.¹⁹

Work opportunities likewise inspired more Puerto Ricans to set their sights on San Francisco. Some migrants now came directly from the island; others first worked in California agriculture or served in the armed forces before taking up residence in the metropolis.²⁰ Ismael Sandoval Adorno first journeyed from Puerto Rico in the mid-1940s, picked fruit in Fresno for a few seasons, and eventually deduced that year-round, urban employment would be more advantageous. He then brought his siblings, uncle, and other relatives once he had established himself in the city. Elba Montes and her parents experienced a similar trajectory. They moved to San Francisco in 1949, but their settlement process was facilitated by kin who had left the island years earlier. Montes, Sandoval, and their relatives were but two families who formed part of the Puerto Rican diaspora living by the Golden Gate. Though the city did not become a major destination during the postwar migration years, it retained the most sizable Puerto Rican community on the West Coast until 1970.²¹

Population growth amplified Latinos' concentration in central-city areas, especially the Western Addition, Buena Vista (present-day Haight-Ashbury), the Mission, and South of Market. Still a predominantly working-class population, Latinos typically gravitated to these districts because they offered cheap housing and proximity to factories, garment shops, and the waterfront. Leticia Guerrero and Julia Melendez were among the many Latinas who joined the Dressmakers Union in the 1940s and called Buena Vista home. A popular account from this era simultaneously revealed that most Central Americans were workers and resided in the Western Addition.²² Considerable numbers of blue-collar individuals and families also lived in Potrero Hill, Bernal Heights, Bayview, and the Outer Mission. Some of their middle-class counterparts lived

in these various neighborhoods too; others procured housing in the Richmond and Sunset districts, which were solidly middle class and overwhelmingly white. Latinos did not encounter impenetrable racial barriers in the housing market, yet accessing white neighborhoods often hinged on having lighter skin, claiming a Spanish identity, and speaking English.²³ Although the exclusion differed from that experienced by African Americans—in degree and in kind—most Latinos found themselves living in multiracial areas deemed unappealing and blighted as the postwar era wore on.

By 1950, the prewar preeminence of North Beach as a hub of Latino settlement had been eclipsed by the Western Addition, Buena Vista, and the Mission.²⁴ A congested rental market and soaring density gradually made North Beach a less viable and attractive option. The surge in residential dispersion coincided with a heightened diffusion of sociocultural and commercial life. Restaurants, food marts, bookstores, home furnishings shops, and other businesses catering to Latinos steadily dotted the Western Addition and especially the Mission. Nightspots and theaters featuring Spanish-language films enriched leisure life in these districts as well.²⁵ Social service institutions, too, served as grounds for recreational activities. Beginning in the late 1940s, the Canon Kip Community Center in South of Market organized dances, picnics, and sporting activities for adolescents. The center concurrently sponsored a youth council and teen newspaper, with Tony Fernandez, Josie Sigala, and other young Latinos as contributing writers. On the sacred front, while Guadalupe Church retained historical and communal prominence, Latino Catholics who did not live in North Beach now sought out other parishes. St. Joseph's Church in South of Market along with St. Charles Borromeo and St. Peter's in the Mission had sizable Spanish-speaking congregations by the mid-1950s; parishioners there attended masses, *novenas*, and religious fiestas.²⁶ All these budding fields of fellowship and conviviality indicated that the districts hemmed around downtown offered more than just housing: they sustained and diversified Latinos' social and communal existence.

Power and Resilience in the Early to Mid-1940s

One aspect of everyday life remained constant amid population growth and neighborhood transition: political consciousness and action continued to be chiefly cultivated within the labor movement. Three years before the country

entered the war, a cadre of middle-class Latinos led by attorney Louis Vásquez and newspaper publisher Nick Di Matteo formed a Spanish-American Democratic Club. They sought "to unite all the Spanish and Latin-American voters of the State in a political club."²⁷ The group's reach and activities proved extremely limited. Political mobilization built exclusively around ethnic identity and disconnected from labor did not attract many followers at this time. Some Latinos probably did not regard ethnicity alone as a force for unity or activism; others may have considered labor organizing as more directly relevant to their lives or simply may have been unaware of Vasquez's and Di Matteo's effort. Di Matteo's *El Imparcial* actually ceased publication in 1938, and city residents would not see the publication of a stand-alone, Spanish-language newspaper until 1948. Working-class Latinos instead obtained news and political education through the labor press, including the Spanish-language version of the ILGWU's *Justice* and Spanish-language inserts in the ILWU's *Dispatcher*.

Maritime laborers and garment workers began the new decade with gusto to shore up their gains, rights, and leverage. In spring 1940, warehousemen, cannery workers, scalers, and knitwear workers all found themselves on the picket line, in arbitration, or in jurisdictional disputes. Bread-and-butter issues regularly propelled them to action as employers attempted to trim union contracts. While warehousemen like John Gomez struck for increased wages and vacation time, Philip Cano and his cannery brothers sought contract renewal free of wage cuts. The ACWU and eleven other unions engaged in seasonal fishing expeditions expected to maintain or boost past agreements. Neither weeks of governmental mediation nor employers' claims of soaring operational costs weakened unionists' resolve. The San Francisco salmon packers eventually opted to abandon the season instead of yielding to workers' demands. This outcome had critical economic implications for thousands of seasonal laborers and their families. Men such as Cano could nevertheless find political and affective succor in knowing that their determination and unanimity of purpose, though tested, had not been broken.²⁸

Proletarian fearlessness and a veneration of unionism remained ascendant despite spiraling and sometimes unexpected obstacles. Cognizant of employers' attempts to minimize workers' clout, unionists consistently affirmed the sanctity of the closed shop and the indispensability of workplace solidarity. The "courage and stamina" of Latinas and their workmates in the Knitgoods Workers Union, ILGWU Local 191, presented a case in point. In late 1939, 250 women began an extended challenge to adverse conditions and

“abuses” at the Gantner and Mattern plant, where they made sportswear and swimsuits. Toiling under an expired contract, the company’s rejection of cost-of-living adjustments and an all-inclusive vacation clause bred resentment. Unionists concurrently complained about managers’ issuance of pink slips and the use of “coercion and intimidation” to speed up production. Tensions escalated in October when janitors at this same plant went on strike and the knitgoods workers—adhering to union principles—refused to cross the custodians’ picket line. Their secondary strike spawned an unforeseen conundrum: Gantner executives asserted their prerogative over job reinstatement once the janitors’ dispute ended. Months of stalled negotiations and the firm’s unwillingness to reemploy 80 workers—a decision the union defined as a lockout—then impelled Local 191 to launch its own strike in March 1940.²⁹

For the next fifteen months, knitgoods workers staged an offensive that won them allies and sympathizers near and far, even though Gantner’s position remained unchanged. Unionists charged the company with circumventing the process of collective bargaining; discriminating against union members; and supplanting older, well-paid laborers with nonunionized, cheaper ones. Bosses offered a simple justification for denying employment to individuals “left out”: those workers supposedly had poor rates of productivity. The dispute eventually came before the National Labor Relations Board, which dismissed the union’s grievances in January 1941 and emboldened the business to proceed with operations as it saw fit.³⁰ Still, strikers did not back down. They persisted with their pickets as the ILGWU instituted a nationwide boycott of Gantner products; other unions also mounted secondary boycotts and refused to handle “hot cargo” (i.e., goods produced at a struck site). Incessant pickets, property damage, decreased profits, store closures, and a “vilified” reputation did not move Gantner to reconsider negotiation. By mid-1941, most strikers began to accept their loss and look for new jobs elsewhere. The outcome delivered a painful reminder that “great fervor” and resilience did not always generate triumph.³¹

The knitgoods workers’ strike converged with the scalers’ seven-month campaign to quell encroachment on their syndical turf. In March 1940, president Pete Garcia excoriated AFL-backed machinations to organize a rival union, one that would “wreck the conditions the [scalers] have fought so hard to get” by accepting lower wages and “no closed shop and hiring hall.”³² Matters turned more perilous months later when the Sailors Union began pressing some shipping companies to offer scaling jobs to unemployed seafarers. Construing the situation as a threat to their livelihood and their

union’s bailiwick, Garcia and his comrades set up a picket line in October and called on other ILWU locals for support. Denying any wrongdoing, representatives for the American President Lines instead accused the sailors of strong-arm methods and identified the scalers as “employees of certain contractors” lacking a collective bargaining agreement with the company itself. ILWU officials rebutted: they circulated an existing agreement and chided the firm for colluding with the sailors’ organization. “Designating land workers as standby sailors,” Harry Bridges communicated, allowed the shipping line to “evade federal [labor] laws” and practice “subterfuge,” effectively benefiting the company’s pockets at the scalers’ expense. Bridges went further and raised the specter of secondary strikes and boycotts of hot cargo by reminding the Waterfront Employers Association that longshoremen would observe the scalers’ picket line.³³

As deliberations unfolded, shoreside tensions escalated, and the scalers fended off sailors’ attempts to break up their picket line. The showdown—filled with indignation, insults, and incessant scuffles—led some workers to seek medical assistance while others found themselves in police custody. Scalers’ protests and the ILWU’s intervention nevertheless bore fruit. Within weeks, the SSU had “forced the American President Lines to agree . . . that a contract covering their work ought to be negotiated with their union.”³⁴ Employers’ volte-face befittingly provoked boasting and cheering. The celebration masked what some scalers may have suspected and feared: intractable employers and jurisdictional troubles would consume their energies many times again.

Broader reflections on the state of citywide labor relations likely influenced the scalers’ fortunes. Rising antagonism between capital and labor received considerable attention in the public sphere, and city dailies devoted much coverage to the tense situation in workplaces around town. In April 1940, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on the Maritime Federation of the Pacific’s “warning that waterfront peace [would be] impossible if employers insist[ed] on ‘chiseling’ unions out of gains already established.”³⁵ The scalers’ troubles began around this time, and their dispute presented one of multiple cases marked by doubtful labor-management amity. Domestic harmony came to acquire paramount significance—ideologically, materially, and strategically—once the United States formally entered World War II in December 1941. As the nation and its industries converted to wartime production, unions began to proclaim “Unity for Victory.”³⁶ Translating these declarations into practice depended on easing the AFL-CIO divide and nurturing friendly relations between workers and their employers.

American unionists comprised a vast "volunteer army of production soldiers," blazoned the *Labor Herald* in March 1942. Harry Bridges, as ILWU president and California CIO director, could not have agreed more. That month, he urged labor leaders to "concentrate all their energies on speeding up production for war." John Acosta, Richard Camplis, and other Latinos who sat on the local CIO council or presided over their unions gave heed and moved to embrace Bridges's message. The directive positioned working people as agents, or "instruments," of freedom, democracy, and resistance to totalitarianism.³⁷ Pragmatically, blueprints for victory attended to global and local concerns. The furniture workers' win-the-war program, for instance, emphasized the speedy conversion to wartime production, the formation of labor-management committees to oversee industrial output and work rules, and the stabilization of wages to offset the upsurge in costs of living. Their sweat and "sinew," unionists foresaw, would buttress the nation, its armed forces, its economy, and their households.³⁸

Patriotism and practical expectations aside, the fulfillment of labor-management cooperation was neither automatic nor straightforward. Agreement and accommodation proceeded expeditiously in some industries while discord and complications stalled the process in others. Rapprochement often depended on economic calculations and openness to wartime adaptations. Employers and laborers with stakes in the Alaska salmon industry presented a case in point: they proved amenable to conciliation given the costs incurred from the work season's cancellation in 1940 and the thorny negotiations a year later. In June 1942, Stephen Glumaz and Pete Gutierrez rejoiced with their union brothers after securing wage increases and a boost in overtime pay. The two men sat on a joint negotiating committee responsible for brokering a Pacific coast-wide contract that standardized pay and work conditions for Alaska-bound men from San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle. Unionists in other industries celebrated salary upgrades as well. San Franciscans in the Textile Workers Union Local 71—composed of women and men who made potato sacks, tents, and other such goods—reached a compromise with their bosses in October 1942. Frank Garcia, John Ortega, and others on the bargaining committee accepted "5 cents an hour pay raises" and back pay for some five hundred workers in three plants; they saw this as a preferable alternative to protracted arbitration from the War Labor Board, which could have prescribed a similar or less favorable settlement.³⁹

In contrast, steelworkers at the American Can Company plant—where they manufactured everything from motor-oil cans to ammunition containers—

consistently declined to lower their demands and eventually turned to the War Labor Board after negotiations broke down. Gladys Lará, Alfred Padilla, and hundreds of others in the Steel Workers Organizing Committee Local 1684 sought wage increments, "equal pay to women doing men's work," and participation in an "industry council to plan production."⁴⁰ Their strategies, including work shutdowns and appeals for intercession from the War Production Board, did not sway the company. American Can leaders' aversion to a labor-management committee illustrated how this model of cooperation had much more buy-in from unionists and government officials. The road to unity, as the steelworkers learned, could be a rough one, even in wartime.

The labor movement faced other obstacles during the war years, which unions met with grassroots mobilization and electoral participation. The parameters of free speech and the scope of labor solidarity, in particular, came under more scrutiny from employers, policymakers, and the public at large. In June 1941, the California legislature enacted a statute outlawing secondary boycotts as well as unionists' practice of refusing to handle hot cargo. Overriding a gubernatorial veto and backed by agricultural growers and industrialists, most state legislators defended the act as economically sound and in the public's interest. The law would prevent the loss of revenue for individuals, businesses, and the state, they argued, while curbing "interference with the production of goods and equipment for national defense."⁴¹ Union leaders, the rank and file, and their supporters dissented loudly: they viewed the legislation as an infringement on civil liberties and a constriction of labor's power. Assemblyman Thomas Maloney from San Francisco opposed the measure because it stripped a worker's "right to strike to help another employee" and curtailed freedoms of speech and assembly. More than thirty thousand union men and women petitioned Maloney and his colleagues to protect these rights during the bill's consideration; they then pledged to overturn the statute through a referendum. By September, the "union labor forces of California," admonished the *Los Angeles Times*, had "made good on their threat to block the anti-hot cargo act." The collection of more than two hundred thousand signatures indeed halted the law's implementation, making it possible to place the issue directly before voters the following year.⁴²

Throughout 1942, AFL and CIO unionists alike devoted great energy to public education, fundraising, and get-out-the-vote drives, especially as the fight over hot cargo intensified during the summer and fall months. Prominent labor leaders built their case by arming themselves with nationalism and the language of freedom. They cast the law as un-American, autocratic,

and "a veritable slave bill," one that "would compel employees to work against their will." Patriotism was of course a malleable tool. The rhetoric of national unity and industrial peace, the emphasis on wartime production, and concerns about material scarcity had grown more potent since the legislature's original action. In November 1942, approximately 55 percent of California voters upheld the state's ban on hot cargo and secondary boycotts for the remainder of the war.⁴³

San Franciscans could take some comfort in knowing they bucked the statewide trend: a majority of those who voted opted to invalidate the law.⁴⁴ Even so, the setback brought two essential points to the fore. It reminded union members that labor rights were not immutable, and pushed them to recognize the need to expand their vigilance and strategies to confront further obstacles. Future success, some labor activists noted, required a reorientation of grassroots action and a more relatable rendering of their agenda. "We're not going to stop mobilizing . . . through the union apparatus," explained the SFCIO Political Action Committee (PAC) in 1943. "But experience has shown that *this is not enough*." The newly created branch of the local CIO prescribed a far-reaching operation built on precinct work. Ace de Losada, Barbara Santos, and all others engaged with this committee accordingly set out to widen their outreach activities, strengthen political ties with neighbors, and convince nonunionists that "their interests and ours are the same." De Losada and Santos were not the only Latino unionists who did so. Dozens of them traversed their neighborhoods during election campaigns—canvassing residents, establishing common ground, and imploring citizens to vote.⁴⁵

In turning to precinct work, Pearl Gonzales, Anacleto Varoz, and others embraced three facts of mid-century political life. They understood activism had to take place within and beyond their unions and that amassing allies required ongoing education and rapport building. Gonzales and her peers also knew that upending any future detriment to working people demanded robust engagement with the electoral process. These realities took on particular significance during the 1944 presidential campaign. Organized labor intended to keep Roosevelt in the White House and devoted a good portion of its political energies to do so. "[We] have two big jobs to do," stressed the SSU that fall. Alongside their paid labors, union members rang doorbells and encouraged neighbors to back the Roosevelt-Truman ticket. Like other CIO unionists, the scalers identified Roosevelt as the leader who would broker peace, permit the labor movement to flourish, and ensure postwar security. A vote for FDR, as union officers John Acosta and Mary Sandoval explained

it, would amount to victory in war and prosperity for the nation, as well as the advancement of workers' rights and interests.⁴⁶

Latinos' engagement with the Democratic Party before the 1960s has received rather limited scholarly attention, though they turned to the Democratic Party apparatus long before the Viva Kennedy clubs and the War on Poverty.⁴⁷ In San Francisco, the SSU and its partners solidly nurtured connection and allegiance to Democratic leaders and agendas by the 1940s. "*Se les suplica se registren* (We beseech you to register)," read a bilingual piece in the *Dispatcher*, "to reelect President Franklin D. Roosevelt."⁴⁸ Appeals like these and immersion in the "Roosevelt camp" extended well beyond the ILWU and presidential elections. The campaign work of furniture workers Edelmiro Huertas, Elvira Silva, and others in UFW 262 confirmed as much. In 1944, they crisscrossed their precincts, distributed campaign literature, and urged neighbors to send Franck Havenner back to Congress. A staunch progressive, Havenner had lost his congressional seat in 1940; the "Roosevelt candidate" now regained it by promising a postwar future marked by harmony and abundance.⁴⁹ The votes and outreach efforts of Latino unionists contributed to Havenner's win, and they did so again two years later. By 1946, subcommittees of Spanish-speaking and Chinese voters, among others, sprouted within the SFCIO PAC. The development affirmed the value and utility of summoning ethnic ties for electoral purposes. A year later, as Havenner set his sights on the mayor's office, his campaign team recognized Latinos as a budding political bloc. "*Mire la obra de Havenner* (Look at the Havenner Record)," instructed a 1947 pamphlet, as it extolled the politician's commitment to the working class, racial minorities, and the well-being of all San Franciscans.⁵⁰ Union members were of course already well acquainted with the politician. But in what represented one of the earliest formal overtures by a mayoral candidate, Havenner underscored his awareness of Latinos' linguistic heritage and civic interests. The production and dissemination of bilingual materials made evident that the candidate wanted all Latinos to see him as their next mayor.

Fair Play, Equal Opportunity, Civic Unity

Latinos, other people of color, and white residents committed to fulfilling the nation's civic creed consistently identified "fair play," equal opportunity, and inclusion as part and parcel of prosperity. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s,

they undertook a crusade to eradicate inequities and exclusionary practices based on race, color, national origin, and religion. This civic venture developed and flourished—forcefully although not exclusively—in the labor movement, especially within the CIO. In postwar California, the CIO and the West Coast branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP-WC) spearheaded the statewide FEP drive.⁵¹ Local civil rights activism fed into this regional effort and, notably, drew a heterogeneous cast of participants from the start. Many CIO unions and a few AFL locals advancing a civil rights agenda were, after all, multiracial entities. Studies of mid-century San Francisco have nevertheless tended to overlook Latino and Asian American involvement in the quest for racial equality. The absence or minimal role of institutional advocates akin to the NAACP explains some of this oversight. Yet the historical record reveals that Latinos were not disconnected or peripheral to civil rights work. Their sensibilities and organizing just happened to materialize most vigorously and extensively within their unions.

The ethos of equality and tolerance propagated by the ILWU and UCA-PAWA in the 1930s permeated other CIO locals by the 1940s. Wartime mobilization, worker protest, and President Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802 (1941)—barring discrimination in war production industries—impelled more labor unions to adopt forceful stances on inclusion and equal access to jobs. Some unionists sustained their position by making a utilitarian correlation. As the furniture workers stressed, maximum wartime output depended on the employment and unity of all laborers irrespective of background. Casting discrimination as an impediment to manpower essentially offered a pragmatic strategy to push for civil rights. The Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards (MCS), which had lagged behind other CIO maritime unions on matters of equity, likewise seized on the "productionist rhetoric" and soon emerged as a fearless proponent of racial justice. Other unionists built a more explicit connection between wartime rhetoric, inclusion, and American ideals. Steel workers in SWOC 1684 branded racial exclusion and discrimination as inimical to the country's civic creed and pledged to abrogate such practices. The "fight for democracy" abroad, they posited, had to be accompanied with a democratization of the American workplace and society at large.⁵²

Local unions' civil rights efforts intersected with the work of the California CIO's Minorities Committee, established in 1943. Frank Lopez of UFW 262 and Mary Sandoval sat on this statewide body from its formation. The committee offered technical assistance to CIO locals as they ironed out their

"minorities programs;" it also devoted much energy to critical analysis, advocacy, and the formulation of legislative proposals with sharp attention to race. Amid world war, Lopez, Sandoval, and their colleagues engrossed themselves in the ideological process of welding integration and opportunity into the win-the-war platform. "The establishment of the Four Freedoms for all nations, minority groups and colonial people," relayed their task force, "require[d] an end to abuses" motivated by racial hatred and intolerance. Committee members translated this vision into a docket of activities and public policy proposals calling for justice and equality.⁵³

In August 1943, the Minorities Committee invited over six hundred representatives from unions—both CIO and AFL locals—and civic groups to San Francisco for a regional conference on racial and national unity. Attendees considered a myriad of issues and resolved to press for the abolition of poll taxes, hiring teachers and police officers from minority groups, a liberalization of immigration laws for the Chinese, and the continuation and expansion of the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), among other measures. Civil rights advocates understood that the workings of California's multiple color lines required attacks on many fronts; many likewise acknowledged that legislative change would be unlikely to materialize without education and public pressure. The Minorities Committee accordingly recommended political action and mobilization to "educate out, legislate out, blast out, and banish [discrimination] from American life."⁵⁴

Gatherings like the 1943 unity conference connected progressive unionists with individuals and citizen groups that regarded "walls of prejudice" as corrosive to everyday stability and harmony.⁵⁵ If population growth and wartime dislocations compromised social relations, these same factors compelled numerous organizations to take strong stands against bigotry and hatred. The Bay Area Council Against Discrimination pulled in leaders and activists from the local NAACP, the San Francisco League of Women Voters, the International Institute, and other community-minded institutions, and acceded that "tolerant" San Francisco was not without its share of racial troubles. Its antidote for discord and acrimony was simple: like other mid-twentieth-century liberals, the league's participants believed that the democratic creed would flourish and materialize through education, persuasion, and interracial interaction. Its successor, the Council for Civic Unity (CCU), would propagate this outlook during the postwar era.⁵⁶

San Franciscans of middle-class and professional standing generally constituted the CCU's membership, while their working-class counterparts



Figure 4. Mary Sandoval, Joe Mendez, and Gwen Kircher of the Ship Scalers Union, and Revels Cayton of the California CIO Minorities Committee, 1943 (left to right). Courtesy of ILWU Library and Archive.

continued to mobilize for civil rights through their unions. City residents in these networks shared the goals of equality and fairness; differences in tone and strategies, however, would eventually influence their alliances and the evolution of civil rights organizing in a Cold War context. Latinos did not hold leadership positions in the CCU or its predecessor. Social workers, lawyers, and other professionals backed the CCU's efforts as interested citizens or staffers of the council's institutional partners. Attorney Louis Vásquez and caseworker Tomás García fit such profiles: Vásquez had a track record of civic engagement and García ran a youth program at the International Institute. Some working-class Latinos probably learned about the CCU through the SFCIO Council or their unions but did not participate in the CCU's day-to-day activities. Still, working- and middle-class citizens involved in civil rights work crossed paths at high-profile events and collaborated with one another in the immediate post-World War II years.

In early March 1946, San Francisco's civil rights brigade converged at a public meeting to promote and push for a statewide measure prohibiting discrimination in employment. Members and allies of the SFCIO Council, the CCU, the San Francisco NAACP, the Warehousemen's Union, the SSU, and the ACWU collectively hailed FEP as a hallmark of Americans' unity. A number of progressive and multiracial AFL locals—such as the Cooks Union Local 44 and the Miscellaneous Employees Union Local 110 (representing dishwashers, kitchen porters, and restaurant custodians)—joined them as well.⁵⁷ Community assemblies such as these had transpired since early 1945, when Assemblyman Augustus Hawkins (D-Los Angeles) introduced a proposal to codify FEP into law and set up a California FEPC to monitor its implementation. Civil rights advocates praised and mobilized forcefully behind Hawkins's plan. But the bill encountered consistent opposition in Sacramento and did not move out of committee in either summer 1945 or winter 1946.⁵⁸

The labor and civic forces of equality did not back down: they "found another way to act" by turning to a citizen-led initiative. The California CIO and the Statewide Committee for a California FEPC, which counted Luisa Moreno and Louis Vásquez on its planning boards, coordinated an effort to bring the issue directly before voters in November 1946. These umbrella organizations underscored that success hinged on "putting on the heaviest pressure" and mounting large-scale educational campaigns at the local level.⁵⁹ San Franciscans who gathered at the civic center in March 1946 enthusiastically answered the call. In subsequent months, unionists involved in the SF-CIO's PAC prepared mass mailings, distributed leaflets on street corners, and urged residents to back FEP by voting for Proposition 11. The largest number of precinct workers came from ILWU locals and the MCS, whose members also made monetary contributions to the PAC. Such actions affirmed unionists' devotion to the democratic process, street-level mobilization, and civil rights.⁶⁰

Californians who backed Proposition 11 stressed that the measure advanced American democracy. The labor market, they explained, should complement the polity and be structured around parity of access and participation. Their opponents thought otherwise and branded the initiative as biased, dangerous, counterproductive, and un-American. The artfully named Committee for Tolerance, based in Southern California but with statewide reach, maligned the proposition as unfair and menacing. It construed the measure as an infringement on employers' rights to make decisions about their private enterprises and disadvantageous for laborers—naturalized as white—who

might be replaced by minority candidates. The California Chamber of Commerce and the Farm Bureau Federation, representing agribusiness across the state, agreed and emphasized that a law mandating integration would spawn friction between workers, leading to turmoil, violence, and decreased productivity.

The "No on 11" forces interlaced their economic rationalizations with teachings about social relations and excessive government power. Tolerance could only be achieved through education and free will, they insisted, not by compulsory legislation or "any attempt to force social regulations by law." Their analysis effectively foreclosed the educational potential presented by a diverse workplace and instead assailed integration as a by-product of "governmental coercion." And to fully discredit the advocates of racial liberalism, the opposition turned to red-baiting and excoriated the FEP plan as "a pet of both the CIO-PAC and the Communists." Proposition 11 embodied a "communistic plan," claimed the Committee for Tolerance and other critics, because it would authorize undue and oppressive governmental action while generating discord and instability in daily life. The multilayered critique succeeded: two out of three voters in November 1946 embraced an illiberal view of tolerance and cast suspicion on state action to democratize the workplace.⁶¹

Samuel Valadez, Antonio Montoya, and Reinaldo Viquez, while dejected, did not construe the proposition's defeat as the deathblow to the FEP crusade. These MCS members remained convinced that their democratic and integrated work environments should not be the exception but the rule. Thousands in the SFCIO's orbit shared this sentiment. Unionists' continued organizing and, in particular, the CCU's activities (e.g., meetings with city power brokers, presentations before official bodies) found receptive ears at decade's end. In October 1949, the Mayor's Committee on Human Relations—created a year earlier and composed of varied representatives from civil society—released a report and policy proposal urging the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to pass a municipal FEP ordinance. The committee had considered the issue for many months; heard the perspectives from labor, business, and minority groups; and reviewed research data presented by the CCU. It concluded, as one member put it, "If we as Americans believe that discrimination is morally wrong then we certainly have a moral right to legislate against it."⁶² Local legislators would have to be swayed by more than moral certitude. They accordingly embarked on a protracted consideration of FEP, which lasted until spring 1951.

San Francisco's supervisors had to weigh whether the city they had identified, back in 1948, as "outstanding for amity and good relations among her various racial, religious, and ethnic groups" should stamp out employment discrimination through legislative channels. Valadez, Montoya, and Viquez certainly hoped their elected officials would do so. In January 1950, these leaders from the Asociación Latina Hispana Americana wrote the supervisors and implored them to pass an FEP ordinance. This association, an affiliate of the Asociación Nacional Mexico Americana (ANMA), attracted many members from left-leaning labor unions such as the MCS. Valadez and his colleagues drew on their lived experience to counter views of prejudice as an illusion. "We are convinced that discrimination does exist here," they noted. "And we can find no connection between a person's skin coloring or national origin and *that* person's ability."⁶³

Latinos across the city shared a parallel sentiment and expressed their views in multiple ways. Some chose to contact the supervisors directly. "To stop prejudice, discrimination, et al. is the ideal before us," communicated E. M. in a letter to the board. Simply identifying as "a Mexican," this resident clamored for public redress and reminded the supervisors that they "[were] the controlling factor" in mitigating inequity. Others made such views known by signing petitions circulated by unions, civic groups, and mutual aid societies. That hundreds of Latinos endorsed the FEP measure by listing their union affiliation alongside their names revealed the enduring interdependence between unionization and political identity as the 1950s began.⁶⁴ Many scalers, warehouse workers, longshoremen, dishwashers, cooks, and stewards appealed not only through written petitions but also through public protests outside City Hall. Doing so fit squarely within an established tradition of direct action. Their detractors quickly seized on the Cold War atmosphere to censure confrontational tactics and to marginalize unionists' pursuit of FEP.

Resistance to a nondiscrimination ordinance proceeded from constituencies who revived and amplified the critiques levied against Proposition 11. San Franciscans in business organizations, homeowner associations, and neighborhood improvement clubs—whose membership and property interests sometimes overlapped—consistently reminded the supervisors that city voters rejected the 1946 initiative "by a majority of better than two to one." Economic power brokers, such as Almon Roth and Erwin Easton, believed that an FEP mandate would at once override the 1946 popular vote—thereby undermining the democratic process—and unduly encroach upon "the prerogatives of management." Roth presided over the San Francisco Employers

Council while Easton spoke for downtown interests organized under the North Central Improvement Association. Their perspectives typified much of the anti-FEP sentiment and became boilerplates within entrepreneurial circles. Adamantly opposed to state action, they instead praised and favored educational drives, employers' voluntary action, and managerial goodwill. "We feel that the solution to the problem is one of education, rather than legislation," related C. F. De Lano of the Golden Gate Restaurant Association. Many foes of FEP went further and claimed that discrimination had gradually declined. "Compared to other cities," maintained Roth, the metropolis "is eminently fair to its minority groups and exceptionally free from racial prejudice and discrimination." In this light, San Francisco's distinctiveness and openness—promotional if conjectural—together with employer benevolence made state interference dispensable. This line of reasoning then interlocked with charges of governmental overreach. FEP critics characterized their rivals as ill-informed citizens who could not substantiate "alleged discrimination" and failed to grasp the dangers posed by governmental intrusion into private economic affairs.⁶⁵

As the Cold War reached its apogee, anti-FEP forces had potent ideological armor at their disposal: they maligned FEP proponents as belonging to Communist and subversive groups that stoked antagonism and created havoc in their tolerant and fair city. Antonio Montoya and Jose Correa saw nothing destructive or disloyal about forcefully pressing for civil rights and collaborating with hundreds of other FEP advocates in militant, left-wing groups. "*El deber es de nosotros* (It is our duty)," Montoya reminded fellow Latino unionists in the MCS, "to combat discrimination with all possible force." Also a regional organizer for ANMA—an advocacy organization working to secure labor and civil rights for ethnic Mexicans—he underscored the imperative of collaborating with other minority groups and demanding full equality for all.⁶⁶ Fellow radical Correa could not agree more. He belonged to the Warehousemen's Union (ILWU 6), beckoned residents to the Independent Progressive Party, and served as executive vice chair of the San Francisco Committee for a Fair Employment Practices Ordinance (SFCFEPO). This leftist coalition brought together church groups, civil rights organizations (e.g., the city's chapters of the Civil Rights Congress and ANMA), and labor unions expelled from the CIO on charges of being Communist-controlled, among them the MCS and ILWU locals.⁶⁷

The SFCFEPO relied on political lobbying, advocacy, and direct action to press for the enactment of a compulsory FEP law. Correa and his partners

delivered passionate testimony at public hearings and reminded their city supervisors about citizens' future electoral decision-making. In so doing, they evinced an adherence to the democratic process and confidence in their political muscle. "FEPC will inevitably [*sic*] become an election issue [*sic*]," forecast Reverend R. L. Turner, SFCFEPO chairman, "and you would as a public official win for yourself many friends . . . [by] voting to pass this Needed compulsory [*sic*] ordinance."⁶⁸ But having their voices fully heard, some committee members argued, required action outside the legislative chambers and beyond the ballot box. A January 1950 demonstration outside City Hall became emblematic of this orientation. San Franciscans who joined the mass protest that month set out to vocalize their support for FEP, publicize how employers benefited from the status quo, and compel legislators to pass the ordinance. Although local Communist cadres coordinated the event, many picketers had ties to groups in the SFCFEPO. Most participants were probably fellow travelers or independent leftists who drew on a radical tradition of direct action and confrontational politics. Yet such activists as Montoya, Correa, and their political kin all found themselves branded as Communists and, concomitantly, unpatriotic, rebellious, and menacing.⁶⁹

Denunciations of radicalism flowed from the business sector, government officials, and pro-FEP civic bodies stressing national allegiance, political moderation, and public decorum. The CCU and the city's NAACP branch, which had previously collaborated with ILWU locals and others drawn to street protest, now gravitated toward the San Francisco Citizens Committee for Equal Employment Opportunity—composed of ethnic organizations, mainline religious bodies, and AFL and CIO locals. This committee emerged in 1949 and identified itself as "the only organization authorized to speak for the overwhelming majority of citizens and groups interested in eliminating job discrimination." Determined to steer the FEP drive, the liberal network refuted business groups' views while condemning the tone and "leftist side shows" of radical supporters.⁷⁰ Prominent spokesmen, including Edward Howden from the CCU and Richard Dettering of the Citizens Committee, depicted the employers' voluntary plan as well intentioned yet slow to yield change; a full-scale attack on discrimination, they insisted, rested on a policy directive and its enforcement by a municipal FEPC. Howden, Dettering, and their allies concurrently upended employers' tendency to equate advocacy of FEP with communism. They subsumed their brand of civil rights liberalism under Cold War consensus and posited that state protection of civil rights could and should be used to fight communism. Distancing themselves from

“political extremists,” they criticized protest activities that antagonized elected officials and the general public, while arguing that an FEP ordinance would actually weaken Communist sympathies by “depriving [militants] of a prime source of grievance and agitation.” Nondiscrimination legislation, according to liberal supporters, would silence radicals at home and project a positive image of the United States abroad. Enacting the FEP measure “[will] demonstrate to the peoples of the [world] that our democracy works for all the people,” relayed the Citizens Committee in 1951.⁷¹

Committee partners, such as the United Latin Americans of America (ULAA), built their case for FEP precisely by exalting America’s civic creed and cloaking themselves with patriotism. ULAA epitomized a new kind of civic society available to Latinos—one engaged with the polity but directed by middle-class individuals who emphasized the bonds of ethnicity over class. Its members pledged loyalty to the United States, expressed optimism in the American promise, and undertook civic action that was respectable and nonconfrontational. Their political orientation and connection to the dominant civic bodies positioned ULAA as the ambassador of “Americans of Latin American extraction” in City Hall. In 1951, Manuel Maldonado, one of the society’s leaders, explained to the Board of Supervisors that “employment on an equal efficiency basis” would allow Latinos “to take their rightful place in the community.” Inclusion and opportunity, in ULAA’s estimation, would “instill greater faith [among] all Americans . . . in this great democracy of ours.”⁷²

Neither liberal-moderate appeals nor radical-leftist exhortations persuaded a majority of supervisors to add FEP to the municipal code. In 1950, seven out of eleven supervisors voted against the proposal; they concluded that employers’ voluntary measures together with potential action in Sacramento made a local ordinance extraneous. Some among them also thought FEP proponents failed to offer concrete evidence of discrimination to warrant “the police power necessary for such a law.” Downplaying experiential accounts and requesting more empirical data, these legislators instead praised and encouraged further independent efforts from employers. An observer from the judicial branch interpreted the board’s 1950 decision as one that sent FEP “into the never-never land of ‘more study’ and vague voluntary agreements.”⁷³ Almon Roth and his allies begged to differ. In 1951, when city supervisors took up the issue again, employer groups lauded the voluntary plan as extensive, popular, and effective. Roth went further, claiming that San Francisco’s discrimination record paled in comparison to New York’s—a city

with an FEPC in place—and continuing to depict the proposal as a Communist initiative. These stances essentially condensed FEP into a futile scheme designed by sinister forces. Six supervisors sided with some or all of these perspectives and rejected the measure for a second time in sixteen months.⁷⁴ In these early Cold War years, employers’ prerogative, their private convictions, and anticommunism neatly coalesced to trump state action and the codification of fair employment.

Security or Depression; Labor in the 1950s

Two weeks after the impassioned deliberations over FEP, in June 1951, the *Dispatcher* bemoaned the final vote and liberal organizations’ efforts to exclude and silence radical activists. The Citizens Committee for Equal Employment Opportunity and its partners, according to the ILWU newspaper, offered their perspectives alongside “considerable redbaiting . . . and indicated they didn’t think anyone else should be allowed to speak.”⁷⁵ Now outside the CIO, leftist unionists faced off with former allies who set out to impede radicals’ participation in civic life. The situation had looked remarkably different just four years earlier, when the SFCIO Council adopted resolutions proscribing the Taft-Hartley Act and President Harry Truman’s Loyalty Program. In mid-May 1947, thousands of CIO members and their friends assembled at the civic center and denounced the legislation that “would rob American trade unions of their freedoms” and “repress labor.”⁷⁶ Yet, by 1950, the escalation of anticommunist hysteria combined with dissension and repression within the CIO apparatus had eroded the once robust partnership of liberals and radicals.

The Cold War climate undermined the fortunes and gravitas of those unions that had figured prominently in Latino political life since the 1930s, in San Francisco and elsewhere.⁷⁷ Notably, though, leftist political recession did not exhibit a single trajectory, and the process unfolded in a multitude of ways. The Alaska cannery workers confronted one of the earliest and most extreme episodes of decline. Their union had undergone a series of institutional challenges since the mid-1940s, when it amalgamated with Seattle’s Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union Local 7. By late 1947, as Local 7 and other UCAPAWA affiliates found themselves “forced to fight for [their] life” amid attacks on radical unions, the San Francisco branch dissolved.⁷⁸ Without a local body to represent them, the city’s cannery men were left with

two options: join the rival AFL union or find jobs elsewhere. Their long-established friends and collaborators, the scalers, fared better. The SSU survived well after the postwar era and benefited from the unity and protection of the ILWU. It was a precarious existence as jurisdictional raids intensified throughout the 1950s. Scalers' presence and legitimacy in public affairs beyond their workplace, moreover, plummeted. Though they kept their union alive during the Cold War, the scalers could not abrogate their marginalization within the larger polity. Former allies such as the furniture workers struck a liberal course by accepting the Cold War consensus and remaining in the CIO. Their accommodation technically offered economic stability and room for public engagement sanctioned by governmental authorities. Yet UFW Local 262 and other CIO unions increasingly functioned as political auxiliaries to mainstream citizen organizations that now commanded the civic agenda, including FEP. Additionally, furniture workers' economic prospects gradually shrank as their employers migrated to the suburbs; their local ceased operations in San Francisco by the early 1970s. Irrespective of their political leanings, then, most labor organizations that had spearheaded Latino unionization in the 1930s and 1940s met constriction during the Cold War era.

Garment workers' unions notably sidestepped this downward trend. The Dressmakers Union and the General Garment Workers Union Local 352 (formed in the early 1940s) continued to attract members, often Latinas, during the postwar years. Industry leaders themselves acknowledged the prominence of Latin American workers at their plants. In 1951, Walter Haas Jr. of Levi Strauss & Company revealed that 30 percent of employees there were Central Americans. Relatives Elena and Libia Arana were among them: they began making casual wear at Levi Strauss in the mid-1940s. The women then transitioned to high-end women's apparel at the Lilli Ann Company in the early 1950s. Work histories such as theirs were common among garment workers, especially when they sought advancement or experienced layoffs. The change of workplace, of course, did not alter their union membership and unions' obligations to them.⁷⁹

Garment workers consistently relied on their unions to enhance their work lives. The ILGWU locals owed much of their durability to an emphasis on simple unionism and leaders' anticommunist leanings. Political moderation by no means equated with inaction on inequity or wrongdoing. In 1951, Soledad Selva, Aida Jarquín, and other machine operators at the Morris Goldman Company filed complaints involving pay rates that did not con-

form to their level of experience and work classification. Months of arbitration between union officials and employer representatives eventually resulted in wage adjustments. These women's experience was not unique: faulty remuneration proved to be a frequent grievance brought before ILGWU officials. Garment workers concurrently asked union leaders to mitigate on-the-job perils. Frances Moreno, for example, sought protection from harassment. In 1954, the fourteen-year veteran of Morris Goldman informed ILGWU leaders of some troubles with a male coworker who "bothers and insoltes [*sic*] me in every way." Moreno identified the man in question but did not elaborate on the cause of aggravation; it may well have involved an affront to her know-how and authority (given her seniority), unwanted sexual advances, or retaliation for rejecting those overtures. She definitely wanted her local to intervene and vowed to keep "coming to the union" if the situation did not improve. In asking union officials to correct another employee's misconduct and pursuing redress for an employer's infraction, these workers confirmed abiding faith in and reliance on labor unions to ensure their well-being.⁸⁰

Individual cases of protest did not forestall collective mobilization to tackle shared grievances. Navigating the Cold War current of course demanded prudence and calculation. Strike action often functioned as a last recourse, and locals had to obtain authorization from the local board overseeing all ILGWU unions and the San Francisco Labor Council (SFLC). Political restraint and institutional hierarchy notwithstanding, the Dressmakers Union struck on numerous occasions in the 1950s. In January 1952, after months of negotiation and "fruitless conferences" with the Sidley Corporation, Local 101 members lost patience and walked off the job. A similar scenario ensued in July 1956. This time, an impasse over demands for a 20 percent increase in wages, two-week vacations, two additional holidays, and severance pay convinced dressmakers that a strike was indispensable.⁸¹ Jessie Gonzales and Mary Meza surely played decisive roles in rallying and assisting their colleagues. Both women immersed themselves in union affairs, sought positions in the local's executive board in 1956, and may have sat on the negotiations committee.⁸² Gonzales and Meza must have also been keenly aware of a new-found predicament: some garment shops had started operating outside the city. Though employers grudgingly compromised on wages and some fringe benefits, they resisted contract clauses that impeded them from "reducing the normal or customary volume of work in San Francisco."⁸³ Dressmakers and others who held manufacturing jobs, in effect, began to witness the incipient stages of deindustrialization. This process would become more acute in the

coming years, even though unionists did not treat it as a foregone conclusion. As the decade wore on, Gonzales, Meza, and their coworkers pressed on with a repertoire of negotiation and mobilization to protect their union jobs and the benefits that came with them.

Hotel kitchen assistants Willie Bolaños and Enrique Osorio, too, understood that union membership was paramount to economic stability. The men worked at the Hotel Panama, one of many inns within the downtown core, and belonged to the Miscellaneous Employees Union Local 110. Within the AFL orbit, Local 110 and the ILGWU locals had long held the distinction of organizing sizable numbers of Latinos. In January 1954, Bolaños, Osorio, and others accepted a transfer to another hotel and, by doing so, evaded crossing a sister union's picket line. Room clerks in the Hotel and Club Service Workers Union Local 283 went on strike that month; the kitchen assistants' relocation circumvented the prohibition of sympathy strikes mandated by the Taft-Hartley Act.⁸⁴ The move—literal and political—betrayed how these Local 110 members clutched to the tenets of labor solidarity and reverence for the closed shop, and translated them from theory into practice.

As the 1950s progressed, more AFL unions began to welcome minority workers. The process benefited Latinos and the labor movement as a whole: it improved workers' economic standing while furthering their loyalty to a labor-centered agenda. The void created by radical organizations' floundering, the ascendancy of fair employment as a dominant principle within the mainstream labor movement, and the AFL-CIO merger in 1955 all facilitated this openness. To be sure, it was a gradual and uneven development. Latinos found it easiest to join unions representing unskilled workers or those with nondiscrimination clauses. Both the Hod Carriers, Building, and Common Laborers Union Local 36 and the Teamsters Local 85 drew clusters of Latinos throughout the 1950s. Admission into craft unions, especially the building trades, remained more difficult. The skill and language requirements for employment, the tie-in between apprenticeships and job opportunities, and a culture of brotherhood pivoting around white privilege and ethnic bonds all presented roadblocks for minority workers. Still, it was not an impossible feat: Claude Alarid (plumber), Joe Torres (carpenter), Louis Hernandez (electrician), and a handful of others managed to break into their respective craft unions. In a parallel development, some Latinos in professional occupations entered white-collar unions. Educators Ena Aguirre, Luisa Ezquerro, and David Sánchez Jr. enlisted in the American Federation of Teachers Local 61 in the late 1950s.⁸⁵ This varied, albeit lopsided field

of unionization proved essential in fortifying Latinos' political sensibilities as the decade neared its end.

In 1957, fair employment practices reemerged as a priority for San Franciscans championing civil rights. ULAA and other civic groups now gravitated toward the reconstituted San Francisco Committee for Equal Job Opportunity, the citizens' alliance leading the FEP drive. The SFLC concurrently set up its own Committee for a San Francisco FEPC, with representatives from twenty-eight local AFL-CIO unions charged with public education and building rank-and-file support for the proposed ordinance.⁸⁶ Few Latinos served as union officers and delegates at this time; labor's perspectives circulating in the public sphere typically originated from SFLC functionaries who were white. Conveying Latinos' interest in FEP essentially fell to ULAA. Its spokesperson, attorney Louis Garcia, appeared before the supervisors early that year, noting, "I can safely say that the sentiment of the Spanish-speaking community of San Francisco overwhelmingly endorses the proposed FEP ordinance." He then delineated ULAA's position by invoking American civic principles, reflecting on moral values, and identifying nondiscrimination as a prerequisite for progress.⁸⁷ Garcia's testimony echoed other proponents' statements; still, parallel contributions did not diminish the exigencies of collaboration and representation. ULAA, after all, functioned as the preeminent Latino civic body of the late 1950s. Garcia's remarks ensured that ULAA's investment in FEP entered the public record and that Latinos were recognized as stakeholders in this decisive civil rights campaign.

The 1957 "civic controversy over FEP legislation" initially mirrored and then diverged from the contest six years earlier.⁸⁸ Proponents and critics reprised an enduring set of ideological postures and arguments—pitting democratic ideals and legislative redress against employers' liberty and voluntary action. Red-baiting, tellingly, figured less prominently in these debates. The decline and silencing of radical groups made the discursive portrayal of FEP as either a defense against Communist agitation or a Communist scheme less compelling. Street demonstrations, confrontational exchanges, and other forms of direct action waned as well. Advocates and foes alike relied on methodical and measured lobbying efforts with little grassroots mobilization. Elected officials responded by exhibiting more willingness to pass the ordinance. Politicians' personal evolution on the matter, the existence of similar ordinances in other major cities, and concrete data confirming the range of discrimination occasioned this readiness in City Hall.⁸⁹

In late May, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors' preliminary approval emboldened civil rights advocates, embittered downtown businessmen, and spawned an experiment in civic bargaining. Finding themselves on the defensive, FEP opponents threatened to sponsor a referendum if the pending bill became law. The move made proponents uneasy for two reasons: a plebiscite would prolong their work, and city voters could well repeal the mandate from City Hall, a fear informed by past repudiation of Proposition 11. Lawmakers addressed these frustrations and anxieties by delaying final action and encouraging negotiation. Accommodation became an efficacious and diplomatic alternative to the quandary, and rival groups expeditiously acceded. The compromise plan retained key pieces from earlier proposals: it prohibited racial discrimination in hiring and created a Commission of Equal Employment Opportunity. Tasked solely with investigation and mediation, this new body lacked "punitive authority" and could not sue an employer or union for violation of the law. Fines for an infraction could not exceed three months of pay for the job in question, and all commission proceedings remained secret unless the city attorney undertook legal action. These concessions departed heavily from the robust regulatory mechanism and stringent penalties once envisioned by champions of FEP. The measure's "turbulent history" and its uncertain future, however, convinced liberals in mid-1957 that a weak ordinance, unanimously approved by the supervisors in July, was preferable to nothing at all.⁹⁰

Employment, civil rights, and the public's will converged again in 1958 as California voters considered a "right to work" initiative under Proposition 18. Engineered by the Citizens Committee for Democracy in Labor Unions—an outfit of dissident union members and anti-labor forces—the proposal made it unlawful to deny or curtail employment based on membership or nonmembership in a labor organization. It invalidated the union shop by affixing the "principle of voluntary unionism" to the state constitution.⁹¹ Supporters insisted that the amendment would open job opportunities, protect workers' individual rights, and guarantee their freedom of association. The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and other probusiness entities hailed the initiative as a way to guarantee "greater democracy in labor union elections and [make] union officers more responsible to the wishes of union members."⁹² City labor circles, in marked contrast, found the proposition troubling and did not regard it as a mechanism to invigorate their organizations. They identified the proposal as an anti-labor plan intended to erode unions' power, divide working people, and restore employers' unrestrained authority over employ-

ees. Echoing arguments made by organized labor elsewhere, the SFLC charged that right-to-work arrangements would destroy labor unions, stamp out collective bargaining, and nullify the job security obtained through a union contract. The labor establishment simultaneously capsized proponents' discussions about rights and freedoms, stressing that the proposition would only elevate managerial prerogatives and shackle workers to the "whims of the boss." A plurality of the rank and file concurred.⁹³

Individual unions and civic groups pulled Latinos, including the Alarid family, into the "No on 18" fray. Claude belonged to the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union Local 38; Ruth was active in ULAA; both volunteered with the Latin American Committee for Defense of Our Jobs. This ethnic-centered collective, sponsored by the SFLC's Committee on Political Education, connected unionists with civic advocates, and they jointly spurred Latinos to vote against the initiative. Signaling the maturation of an alliance nourished by a shared investment in unionization and civil rights, the Latin American Committee determined that Proposition 18 threatened job security and "sustain[ed] discrimination." Its members told residents what its passage would "really mean": reduced salaries, a loss of union benefits, and fewer job opportunities for racial minorities. This prognosis stemmed from fears of the open shop and knowledge that many pro-18 backers opposed FEP legislation. With an eye to political numismatics, activists cast the destruction of union jobs and resistance to nondiscrimination as two sides of an employer-minted coin. Pecuniary alarm bred social anxieties as well, especially concerns about familial stability. Relying on the era's potent imagery and ideology of the nuclear family and a male breadwinner, the Latin American Committee cast Proposition 18 as inimical to domestic cohesion and male authority. "Do not destroy your household's union," the group told Latinos. "Protect your family's security." The warning surely persuaded family-oriented Latinos, even if their household arrangements did not conform to societal ideals. Still, some may not have been swayed by elaborate or allegorical arguments. Proposition challengers had one basic message for them: the measure did not guarantee or create jobs for anyone.⁹⁴

Latinos in and outside the Latin American Committee advanced the tradition of grassroots campaign work and political education first expanded by their counterparts in the early 1940s. The 1958 election season found electrical workers Louis Hernandez and Robert Parra disseminating the "unpleasant facts" about the right-to-work proposal in their neighborhoods, street corners, transportation hubs, and other public areas. They were but two

**SEGURIDAD
O
DEPRESION?**

**NO DESTRUYA LA UNION DE SU HOGAR
PROTEJA LA SEGURIDAD DE SU FAMILIA**

No se deje engañar por el sistema de algunas
políticas y patronos. La Iniciativa de Elecciones
entre Patronos y Empleados (Proposición No. 18),
tiene por objeto reducir los salarios y destruir las
Organizaciones de Trabajo.

**ESTA INICIATIVA NO GARA-
NTIZA A NADIE NINGUN DE-
RECHO Y MUCHISIMO MENOS
NINGUN TRABAJO!**

La Proposición No. 18 realmente quiere decir:

- Ninguna seguridad en el trabajo
- Salarios más bajos
- Reducción en el nivel de vivir
- Pérdida de todos sus beneficios más im-
portante de su Union
- Eliminación de los planes de salud, bene-
ficiencia y pensiones

La Proposición No. 18 destruye totalmente la seguridad en el trabajo y apoya la discriminación entre nuestro pueblo trabajador.

VOTE "NO" EN PROP. No. 18

COMITE LATINO-AMERICANO PARA LA DEFENSA DE NUESTROS TRABAJOS

Figure 5. Comite Latino-Americano para la Defensa de Nuestros Trabajos, "Seguridad ó Depresión (Security or Depression)?" flyer, 1958. California Federation of Labor Collection. Courtesy of Labor Archives and Research Center.

Latinos who took up canvassing, distributed leaflets, and reminded Spanish-speaking residents that their "first vote should be NO on Proposition 18." Precinct work complemented voter registration efforts. Long before the election, the SFLC sponsored training for union members and civic activists, including ones from ULAA, to become deputized registrars; this volunteer corps then undertook an aggressive registration drive during the spring and summer months.⁹⁵ These overlapping efforts from the bottom up doubtlessly influenced the electoral results. Approximately 70 percent of city voters rejected the proposition, which was also "beaten by a wide margin" across the state.⁹⁶ Between the euphoria and relief, the Alarids and their friends must have felt proud for having done their part to preserve labor rights.

Efforts to defeat Proposition 18 pulled together the dominant strands of Latinos' political agenda at mid-century: the pursuit of economic security, the drive for civil rights, and an engagement with the electoral process. Union members and civic activists who enlisted in the "most bitterly fought" contest of 1958 understood the link between the closed shop, material prosperity, and fair employment practices, and they translated this connection—linguistically and conceptually—to their relatives and neighbors.⁹⁷ From one vantage point, activism in the late 1950s resembled the challenge to the state-wide prohibition of hot cargo during World War II and the 1946 mobilizations to enact FEP via Proposition 11. But much had changed since the early to mid-1940s. The Cold War ethos altered political life even in San Francisco, stifling the messages, tone, and activities of radical organizations. Notably, as the Ship Scalers Union and its counterparts confronted repression, civic associations enlarged and legitimized their involvement in the polity by stressing respectability, loyalty, and patriotism. The United Latin Americans of America especially endeavored to rally Latinos by expanding a model of civic action that accentuated ethnic concerns as it sidestepped class struggle. To be sure, economic questions did not disappear and ULAA members regularly collaborated with the labor establishment—as exemplified by the Latin American Committee's work in 1958. Latinos would remain active in labor unions in years to come. The ascendancy and risk-free nature of ethnic-based organizing, however, meant that large-scale considerations of economic opportunity, electoral power, and state obligations to citizens' welfare would overwhelmingly emanate from groups akin to ULAA.