

Let Freedom Ring!

By Hanna Kim

We can empower our community to empower themselves. Working with immigrant workers can humble students. We need to recognize their “full humanity” and understand that they have life experiences involving Asian American struggles. By integrating Asian American Studies and current campaigns, both the students and workers will gain insights, strategies, leadership development, and mobilization efforts to bring about increased equality, better working conditions, and critical awareness.

As Chris Corpus and Cha Viloría stated in class, the steps toward mobilization—educating, arousal, organizing, mobilizing—are important. It is vital, though, to remember to first listen to the workers’ stories and to fully understand the issues and dynamics involved with the Assi campaign in order to be effective in educating others, especially college students. Then, hopefully people will become passionate and will rise up to help our cause. In terms of organizing, I think we need a small group of dedicated people to set the pace of the mobilization, schedule meetings, plan vision to concrete detailed road maps, coordinate the workers with the students, and ultimately give voice to the Assi workers. In so doing, we are able to organize and mobilize a grassroots movement whose purpose and mission demonstrate our willingness to persevere against injustice, inequality, and corporate exploitation.

In developing critical awareness, we will be able to take positive action and help people find the direction necessary for our concerted efforts. The *promotoras* of Honduras are prime examples of how organizing and service to the community can bring about a more just and humane order. They learned that by cooperating and working together they could make changes to improve their lives as well as the welfare of their respective families. They brought education by building a school, they improved their health by boiling water, and they asserted their rights by reclaiming their lands.

In “The Garment Worker’s Story,” we encounter bigotry both outside and inside the home. The wife is aware of the patriarchal domination of her husband as well as the bureaucratic oppression of the government. This shows us that we have to combat multiple levels or hierarchies of oppression and ignorance while empowering the workers toward a greater cause. Though difficult, it is a necessary step to reach our goals.

We as UCLA students have the resources, time and power to facilitate these changes. What I learned was that leadership does not mean that we dictate the direction of the campaign but we join the workers, learn from them and together create the path for shared leadership. We need to discard the arrogance of our educational institution and embrace the wisdom of the immigrant workers’ experiences. And by making the workers’ stories your own, I think we can change even the hard of hearts to support the campaign because if the dice of life was thrown another way, that worker might have been you, your parents or your grandparents. So we have to understand that our life is linked to history and forge a new gateway toward freedom, awareness and unity.