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*A conversation with Workplace Project Executive Director Nadia Marin-Molina
by Gregory M. Maney*

Mirroring national trends, U.S. Census figures show a rapid increase in the presence of immigrants on Long

workers on Long Island to achieve socioeconomic justice by promoting the full political, economic and cultural participation of these workers in the communities in which they live. Through the organization, immigrant workers have won key victories, including a New York State law protecting workers against wage theft and the establishment of an official hiring site in Freeport.

The inaugural 1998 edition of the *Regional Labor Review* carried an interview of the first Executive Director of the Workplace Project, Jennifer Gordon,

You know, I was kind of wandering and looking around, and I came here and I met Jennifer, the Workplace Project's first organizer. Once I met people there, I was hooked. I knew that I wanted to come here. So I did a summer internship in my second summer. Then after the summer internship, I was able to work during my third year to get a fellowship to be able to start to work here full time after graduation.

accidents on the job, discrimination, firing, et cetera. And we offered workers' rights courses, orientation and support to people in terms of enforcing those rights.

Over time, that continues to be the core of the organization. I would say the majority of people who come to the organization do so because of some sort of a problem on the job. And we've maintained that core idea and that base of people, of workers in the organization. But the organization has also expanded so that it's not focused exclusively on workplace issues anymore. We've worked on campaigns that have to do with housing, on campaigns that have to do with immigration reform, right now on educating people around the census.

So we've tried to be responsive to the issues that are brought up by the community, because an issue, for example, like immigration reform is something that is not directly a workplace issue, but it is so crucial to people's lives not only as human beings, but also as workers that our board and our members thought that the organization needed to get involved. We've been flexible in terms of looking at and responding to the needs of the community and trying to create campaigns in the areas that are brought up by the community.

The Alliance for Justice is basically our workers' rights program. We've also organized day laborers in different corners of Long Island, in some cases to establish a day laborer hiring site, in other cases just to negotiate with the police or with local officials to ensure that their rights are respected as workers. We have a domestic workers' cooperative called Unity Housecleaners. It strives to improve the working conditions of domestic workers by allowing women a way to organize themselves to promote their own work and also set their own wages and working conditions. In addition, Unity

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legislation. Would you see those as being kind of the main changes to the workplace? And are there other changes you've seen since 1992?

NMM: Yes and no. I started working here full-time in 1996, and I started as Executive Director in '99. Before that we had focused around workplace issues and we had worked at a state level because we had actually pushed for the Nonpayment of Wages Prohibition Act in New York State. We had to work in coalition with other organizations at the state level in order to be able to push for that.

So it wasn't that we had never worked at a State level. Since the time that I started, I think we've worked more on local issues; for example all the battles at the Suffolk County legislature having occurred within the last ten years, and most of the work with local mayors around day labor issues. That actually also occurred before I came, but there's been more of it in the past ten years.

I think we've been more involved at the Federal level. Before 1999 there was also some level of work there on immigration. But an issue like housing, for example, we had never worked on, as far as I know, before the past few years. Again, I think that the basic core strength of the organization is that it's a democratic organization that responds to its member, and that was there in the beginning, and I think it just happened to be that it was focused on one area at the time, and I think over time it's changed, but that it's changed within that core.

So we finally were able to establish such a relationship where they were willing to basically expend their resources going after some of these employers and arrest them. On our end we had members, workers, who were willing to speak to the DA's office, and we were able to build that relationship in such a way that they could do it. So there have been, I'd say, eight contractors arrested by now which had been one of my dreams— to sense of the

And yet you have congressional representatives and senators who

