

CHAPTER FIVE

Job Training and Workers' Rights

This chapter focuses on policies and programs aimed at correcting the problems of joblessness and low-wage employment. More than any single factor, the type of employment held by individuals determines their well-being and, in turn, the overall characteristic of the community. Despite the relatively high number of entrepreneurs documented in the previous chapters, the vast majority of Asian Americans in low-income neighborhoods make a living as paid laborers. Even for households where the adults are not employed, wage work is the most feasible avenue to self sufficiency. Earning a decent wage is necessary to have decent shelter, adequate food and the normal pleasures of life that most of us take for granted.

Gainful employment is not only a financial necessity but also the prevailing social norm. This is certainly true for the larger society, which values the "virtue of work." As David Ellwood, a leading analyst on poverty in the United States, notes:

The work ethic is fundamental to our conceptions of ourselves and our expectations of others. People ought to work hard not only to provide for their families, but because laziness and idleness are seen as indications of weak moral character. The idle rich command as much disdain as jealousy; the idle poor are scorned. (1988, p. 16)

Asian Americans also place a high value on work. The attitudes in San Francisco Chinatown are representative, where the typical resident works in order to avoid "tarnishing his public image and, perhaps more important, to avoid bringing shame upon the family" (Ong, 1984, p. 50). Even among those collecting public assistance, there is a strong drive to work. One survey found that over two-thirds of Asian respondents had attempted to exit welfare, a considerably higher proportion than that for other racial groups (Hasenfeld, 1991).

Unfortunately, finding meaningful employment is an elusive dream for many. While some of the poor are jobless, there is also a large number of "working poor" in the United States (Gardner and Herz, 1992). In Los Angeles County, the ranks of the jobless and the working poor have grown dramatically over the last two decades (Ong et al., 1989). Asian Americans are a part of this unfortunate trend. Among the working class, about a quarter are found in the most disadvantaged jobs (Toji and Johnson, 1992, p. 85). Many of these individuals work full-time, year-round but are still poor. Moreover, working conditions are often deplorable, unhealthy, and unsafe. Among the jobless, the individuals facing innumerable problems are those dependent on public assistance. As we stated earlier, up to half of the Cambodians in Long Beach rely on AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children).

The employment-related problems faced by both the working poor and the jobless must be addressed by the following principles of Community Economic Development:

- Everyone should have an opportunity for employment;
- Workers are entitled to a decent wage;
- Workers should be protected from unfair labor practices;
- For the able-bodied on welfare, public assistance should be transitional, a stepping stone toward full employment.

Although these goals are widely accepted, we are a long way from achieving them. Several factors, most of which are discussed in earlier chapters, contribute to low-income Asian Americans being disadvantaged in the labor market and exploited at the work place. These include: difficulties with the English language, too few marketable skills, little understanding of how the American labor market functions, and a lack of understanding of their legal rights. Overcoming these deficiencies can give low-income Asian Americans greater access to better employment.

This chapter examines two employment-related policies that have potential relevance for low-income Asians. The first is government supported job training, which can improve the skills of workers, thus enabling the jobless to obtain work and low-wage workers to find higher-paying jobs. SALIC reveals the potential benefits of job training: a male Chinese respondent from Long Beach was able to advance from

unemployment to a \$12 an hour job as a machinist after completing a job training program.

The second policy area is workers' legal rights. California has numerous labor laws designed to protect employees, and by exercising these rights, workers are less likely to be exploited. For Asian communities and residents to take full advantage of existing training programs and labor laws, community-based organizations (CBOs) must become more involved in employment-related programs.

Job Training Policies and Programs

Manpower policies, the broader category that covers employment-related issues, date back to the First World War, but efforts to assist low-income and minority populations emerged in the early 1960s as a key element of the War on Poverty (Ulman, 1974, p. 87). Job training was seen as a major component in helping adults (and youth) escape poverty. Over the last three decades, the federal government, which provides the bulk of the funds in this field, has enacted several employment acts. Today, there are three major programs related to job training for disadvantaged workers: the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN), and Targeted Jobs Tax Credit (TJTC). Another program of interest is the Targeted Assistance Program (TAP), which is aimed at refugees on welfare.

JTPA (Job Training Partnership Act), established in 1982, is the federal government's primary employment program, and its primary purpose is "to afford job training to those economically disadvantaged individuals and other individuals facing serious barriers to employment, who are in special need of such training to obtain productive employment." The enactment of JTPA signaled a major switch in policy by the federal government away from direct job-creation in the public sector, which had been the core of CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act), during the 1970s (Levitan and Gallo, 1992). With JTPA, the emphasis shifted to securing jobs in the private sector through a cooperative partnership between government and the private sector.

Under JTPA, the local agency for each Service Delivery Area (SDA) makes decisions on allocating the funds. This region has eight SDAs, including Los Angeles County and the cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach. The Private Industry Council, where representatives from the private sector form a majority, formulates policy guidelines and provides general oversight. A network of firms and community-based

organizations provide the actual job training and employment services to participants. Participants received classroom training, ESL instruction, and subsidized on-the-job training for entry-level positions in such trades as clerical and secretarial work, bank teller, hotel industry worker, and data entry. Job placement, work experience, and employment support services are also provided.

GAIN (Greater Avenues for Independence), the second major job training, is a California initiative designed to reduce welfare usage by improving the education and job skills of its participants. This program is one of numerous welfare reforms since the early 1980s. WIN, a work incentive program that focused on job search and subsidized work experience, was the most widely adopted approach, and required recipients with no children under the age of six to search for work, often with little training. GAIN, which started in San Diego County, represents this state's current effort under the national Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program. Those eligible to participate in GAIN include welfare-dependent single heads of a household (primarily women) with children of school age and heads of a two-parent family (usually men).

The program provides a set of employment-related services including basic education, ESL instruction, on-the-job training, vocational training, support services such as job search assistance and adult school. Where appropriate, GAIN subsidizes tuition, transportation (gas or fare), child care and purchase of textbooks. Training is provided through a number of sources: community colleges, adult schools, regional occupational centers, child care agencies, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs and local unemployment offices. Participants may stay in these programs for as long as needed to advance to the next level of training. Programs at vocational schools for specific job training is a two-year option. If one has already taken two years of community college, GAIN may pay for two more years of community college education. GAIN does not pay for a four-year college education. In job training, GAIN gives priority to occupations that have the best chance of offering employment that will not become obsolete, such as secretarial and clerical work, computer operator, medical assistant, nurses aid and medical technologist.

Each county determines the mix of services offered and the target population according to its priorities, local economic needs and employment opportunities, and the particular characteristics and composition of its welfare recipients. Los Angeles County registers only recipients who have been on public assistance for at least three consecutive years, and has a disproportionate number of individuals

taking part in basic educational training such as ESL (English as a Second Language) training, GED (General Educational Development) preparation for those without a high school education, and Adult Basic Education.

In addition to GAIN, TAP (Targeted Assistance Program) provides help to Asian refugees on welfare. Priority is given to those who have been in the country for 36 months or less, those who are school dropouts, and those with poor or no command of English. The program provides job training services, ESL instruction, skills training, and support services for refugees who are at or below the poverty income level with the goal of promoting self-sufficiency by increasing their potential for achieving gainful un-subsidized employment.

Unlike JTPA and GAIN, which provide mechanisms for direct involvement by local government and CBOs, TJTC (Targeted Jobs Tax Credit) works through the federal tax system and gives tax credit to employers who hire and retain disadvantaged individuals, including low-income youths and welfare recipients. The purpose of this program is to induce private firms to provide work experience by lowering labor costs. The government subsidizes 40 percent of the first year's wages, up to a maximum tax credit of \$2,400 per employee. In exchange, employers are required to keep the worker for at least 90 days or 120 hours. The maximum credit and minimum work requirement for summer youth employment are lower. There are no provisions for training, although it is possible for participants to acquire some on-the-job skills.

Limitations of Job-Training

Despite the promise of a high return to public investments in human capital for the disadvantaged, job training programs suffer from severe limitations. First, the programs often "cream," or choose the most marketable applicants and eliminate those with the greatest needs. Second, the outcomes for participants are marginal, with most job placements in low-wage, entry positions. And third, limited funding has meant only a small proportion of the needy is served.

Like many social service programs, job training programs cream because service providers must meet performance standards. Although per capita cost is no longer used as a criterion, providers are still judged by the post-training employment rates and earnings of participants (U.S. GAO, 1993; California, Employment Development Department, 1993, pp. 3-4) Under these conditions "contractors have

a strong incentive for screening applicants in order to serve those who have the most skills, most education, and can be trained most quickly and at least cost -- in short, the most employable" (Romero and Gonzales, 1989, p. 15). Unfortunately, this creates a bias against the hard-to-serve clients such as individuals with little or no employment skills, or limited English proficiency. One adverse consequence is that minorities, including Asians, are often underserved because they are high-risk participants (U.S. GAO, 1991b).

Even with the tendency to select low-risk participants, outcomes are less than spectacular. Not all enrollees finish the program, and among those who do, not all are placed in jobs. In the Los Angeles SDA, the adult placement rate for those who complete training is only 63 percent, and the average hourly wage of adult participants who had previous wages only improved from \$6.34 prior to entering the program to \$6.82 after completing training. The approximate half-dollar increase translates to a 7.5 percent increase, which is probably better than what a worker would have experienced without the training but is nonetheless small. Consequently, the minimal improvement is insufficient to significantly upgrade the quality of life of the working poor.

The performance of TJTC (Targeted Jobs Tax Credit) is equally poor. The overwhelming majority of the jobs it corrects are low-wage positions in services, clerical work, and sales (U.S. GAO, 1991a). Over two-thirds of the workers in 1988 made \$4.00 or less, and post-placement turnovers were very high. TJTC workers did experience increased earnings, particularly among those without any prior work experience, but the increase "may be more related to the general transition to the work force than to their participation in the TJTC program" (U.S. GAO, 1991a, p. 25). Although there are no data for Los Angeles, we suspect that the same conclusions apply to this region.

Improvements for welfare recipients are also minimal. An analysis of the second-year results in Los Angeles indicates that GAIN increased earnings and lowered welfare payments (Friedlander et al., 1993). Nonetheless, not all found work, and the jobs that were filled were primarily low-wage ones. GAIN participants had a higher employment rate than non-GAIN recipients, but nonetheless, less than a quarter of the former group had some employment during the second year. Those who did work had low-wage jobs. According to JTPA participant statistics for the Los Angeles SDA, the post-JTPA average hourly wage of all adult participants on welfare before the program is \$6.98. The same can be said of GAIN in general because participants who reach the point of seeking employment likely find a job that does

not remove them from poverty. For TAP, hourly wage information provided by several different Asian service providers suggests that post-training average wages are also low, ranging from \$5.00 - \$6.00 per hour.

Of course, moving from welfare dependency to unsubsidized employment is an improvement, and given the low skills of many of the participants, this can be considered an accomplishment. Yet, many of these individuals simply have joined the ranks of the working poor. Job training helps people into entry-level jobs but without additional training, many will remain stuck in low quality, low-wage jobs. At best, the promise of becoming a productive member of society is only partially fulfilled.

Even if we disregard creaming and marginal outcomes, job training programs have another major flaw. They fail to reach a significant number of individuals and to provide continuous upgrading of skills because funding has declined while needs have increased due to the growth of people in poverty and workers in low-wage jobs. Between 1979 and 1984, for example, per capita funding in real dollars for the Department of Labor for employment and training programs was cut by over three-quarters (Bassi and Ashenfelter, 1986, p. 137). This decline was part of a broader withdrawal by the Republican administration from efforts to address poverty in the U.S. (Katz, 1986; Skocpol, 1991).

The tax incentives (credits) to the private sector have not offset the decline in program funding. The total credits claimed over a ten-year period, which includes most of the 1980s, amounted to less than half of the current annual budget for job training for the economically disadvantaged (U.S. GAO, 1991a; U.S. GAO, 1993). The program reaches only a small proportion of the eligible participants (Levitan and Gallo, 1987). Moreover, less than half of the firms receiving credits made specific efforts to recruit and hire targeted groups, indicating that most of the hiring would have occurred even without the subsidy (U.S. GAO, 1991a).

The above limitations of job training apply to all poor people, but Asian Americans face additional problems and barriers associated with their particular needs. For example, the application process for job training programs is particularly difficult for immigrants. Several representatives from Asian service providers of JTPA training remarked that many who are eligible do not enroll because they lack the proper documentation which includes such things as income information for the last 6 months, verification of residency, and birth certificate (Ng, 1993; Chun, 1993). Some prospective participants lose interest in the

program when they realize how difficult it is to apply (Hernandez, 1993).

Moreover, the appropriate training is not always provided. The ESL component of these job training programs is often insufficient to meet the needs of Asian participants. Learning a new language is a difficult task, particularly for Asian immigrants and refugees, who arrive with little schooling. Yet the ESL instruction that is part of these job training programs usually lasts only several weeks or a few months, which is far too short for participants to learn English adequately. Consequently, it is not surprising that programs frequently have trouble placing participants in jobs requiring basic English language training.

Among those who do participate in a training program, the effectiveness of training varies considerably across Asian sub-populations (Chun, 1993; Wing, 1993). Younger females benefit most, in part because they have the opportunity for more extended training and because employers are more willing to hire them for entry-level jobs that also offer opportunities for upward mobility. Interestingly, this outcome holds not only for younger Asian females but also for females in general (Bassi and Ashenfelter, 1986). On the other hand, older Asian males, who tend to be the primary earners in a household and can spare little time for extended training, tend to derive little benefits from job training. In light of the performance standards tied to job-training funding, these variations can create subtle pressure on providers to bypass those with the greatest needs, and this pressure is likely to apply equally to Asian CBOs because they operate under the same reward system (Sy, 1993).

The problem of inadequate training is rooted in inadequate funding. This occurs at two levels. The first is an inadequate share of the existing resources. In the fight for limited job-training resources, Asian organizations have fared poorly because they do not have the political power to gain a fair share (Wing, 1993). Of course, Asian Americans can also be served by non-Asian providers, but even taking this into account, Asian Americans appear to be underserved. For example, Asians comprised over a tenth of the poverty population in California in 1990, but comprised only 8 percent of the 1991-92 state-wide participants in JIPA Title IIA programs. Despite this disparity, our sense is that Asian Americans have and will make significant progress in receiving a fair share of the existing resources.

A far greater problem is the inadequate aggregate resources going to all job training programs for the disadvantaged. With public funding severely limited, Asian CBOs are forced to compete against

other communities for very scarce resources. Consequently, it is not surprising that only a small fraction of the SALIC respondents have received any job training. The inadequate investment in people is not only a tragedy for individuals, but also a net loss for society because not all members can reach their potential.

Workers' Rights

The next policy area is the labor laws that govern employment. While job training programs are designed to help individuals improve their skills so they can find employment or find better jobs, labor laws are designed to ensure fair labor practices. In California, these laws determine wages, working conditions and what is expected from the employee and employer relationship. All industries are required to abide by the minimum requirements of the labor standards, Title 8, Code of Regulations. Some of the most important laws are:

- A minimum wage of \$4.25 per hour;
- Overtime pay equivalent to one-and-one-half the regular pay must be paid for all hours worked over eight in one day and double the rate of pay for all hours worked over 12 in one day;
- For each hour worked over 40 hours in a week, one-and-one-half the regular rate of pay must be paid;
- In industries that use piecework, earnings must equal or exceed the minimum wage and overtime for the hours worked;
- An itemized statement of deductions must be given to each worker with each payment of wages;
- If an employee quits without notice, the wages are due and payable no later than 72 hours later. If an employee is discharged, all wages earned by an employee are due immediately;
- If an employee is scheduled to report for work and does report but is given less than half the scheduled day's work, the employee must be paid one-half of the

scheduled day's work. If the employee is not put to work, he or she must be paid at least two hours wages;

- A rest period of least ten minutes must be provided for each four hours worked. Meal periods of at least 30 minutes must be provided for each five hours of work;
- Employers must carry a policy of Worker's Compensation Insurance covering all employees;
- Employers must provide training and instruction to all employees when a new work procedure or equipment is first implemented; and
- Supervisors are to familiarize employees with the safety and health hazards, and instruct employees in general safe work practices.

Violation of a labor law can result in a fine against the employer as well as restitution to the worker. For some infractions concerning health and safety, employers can be cited and given a fine up to \$7,000. When an accident causes a severe injury or death, jail sentence can be imposed on top of a fine.

California's Division of Labor Standards Enforcement in the Department of Industrial Relations is responsible for enforcing wage and work-hour rules. The Bureau of Field Enforcement, which has an office in Los Angeles, is responsible for investigating violations. Investigations can be initiated by outside complaints and by the Bureau. Moreover, the Division is responsible for producing a plan giving enforcement priorities to areas where workers are relatively low-paid and unskilled, and in industries where there has been a history of violations, such as garment manufacturing, hotels and restaurants, and fast food outlets. This type of enforcement takes the form of a "sweep," where a team of inspectors looks for violations in a given industry for a well defined geographic area.

California's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is responsible for enforcing the state health and safety provisions. Priority is giving to tracking industries with high rates of infractions. Inspectors periodically inspect firms in these industries for toxic or hazardous materials or other harmful conditions to humans or the environment. OSHA also enforces the state provisions related to industrial accidents. The agency requires an employer to report an on-the-job accident, and it is standard practice for OSHA to send an inspector to examine the work site.

Despite the extensive set of labor codes, many employers still treat their workers unfairly, forcing them to accept subminimal wages and to work under unsafe conditions. These practices exist, in part, because many individuals do not know their rights and their entitlement concerning employment, but the problem is more systemic.

Limitations of Workers' Rights

Although labor codes are designed to assist and serve people employed in California, many of the laws and their enforcement are problematic. A general complaint is that labor laws are too complicated for the common man and woman to understand. These laws are written in legal terminology and intended for a highly educated audience. For someone who is uneducated and cannot read or understand English, these laws are incomprehensible. Some specific laws are ambiguous and vague. For example, category 15 on Temperature states that "the temperature maintained in each work area shall provide reasonable comfort consistent with industry-wide standards for the nature of the process and the work performed."

Enforcement is problematic because government agencies are understaffed, with too few field inspectors to effectively and efficiently carry out the responsibilities and duties of the state agencies. Due to limited budgets, field inspectors cannot patrol all of the relevant industries or businesses for potential violations. Rather, state enforcement agencies rely heavily on complaints from workers or third-party monitoring groups, which is the most common procedure of initiating investigations of employers for potential infractions of labor laws (California, Division of Labor Standards Enforcement, 1989). This approach, however, depends on workers' initiative.

Unfortunately, filing a complaint is not easy. To initiate a complaint, one needs to find the right agency, and then locate the right staff person. Some agencies make callers go through a long automated tape before they are allowed to speak to a person. Even for those individuals who exercise their rights, they can become entangled in a cumbersome process. It can take up to several weeks before a complaint is processed through the bureaucracy. According to an inspector from the Division of Labor, Labor Standards Enforcement, many of these delays are a response to Californians being "sue-happy," that is, being litigious. It is asserted that the red-tape is needed if the agency should be taken to court, but it is likely that the process is time consuming for other factors. Regardless of the reason, the end result

is a system that discourages workers from exercising their rights and allows many violators to evade labor laws.

Although Asian American workers suffer from numerous unfair labor practices, they face additional barriers to exercising their rights. As stated earlier, low-income Asian Americans are concentrated in the secondary sector of the labor market, where infraction of labor law is prevalent. Many work in the ethnic sub-economy, where employers are under tremendous competitive pressure to cut labor costs, often by using unfair labor practices. Although there is no reliable statistics on the relative incidents of violations in this sub-economy, one labor-law expert states that infractions are much more frequent in the ethnic sector than in the rest of the economy (Wong, 1993). The problems include subminimal wages, demanding kick-backs from tips, extremely low piece rates, and under-the-table payments.

An example of poor working conditions can be found in the garment industry, which employs a large number of low-income Asian Americans (Kim, Nakamura, Fong, Cabarloc, Jung, and Lee, 1992, p.72). Shops in Los Angeles and Long Beach operate in dirty, decrepit buildings which usually have no heating or air conditioning. Some factories in Long Beach (and Orange County) are located in business parks or garage-like warehouses with little ventilation. Even with fans, the rooms are stifling and unbearable in the summer. Meanwhile, many manufacturers, who remain at legal arms length from the exploitative conditions through a system of subcontracting, have showrooms in plush, high-rise offices in the California Market.

Despite the blatant violations, Asian workers frequently have no recourse. Along with being understaffed, enforcement agencies have few bilingual inspectors (Wong, 1993). The system of worker initiated complaints breaks down because many Asian workers are kept in the dark about their rights. By law, the "Official Notice" stating the labor laws is required to be in plain view so employees can read them to inform themselves of their rights. In some cases, employers of Asian workers post the "Official Notice," as required by law, but these notices are written in English only (Kim, Nakamura, Fong, Cabarloc, Jung, and Lee, 1992). This posting fulfills the legal requirement but nonetheless defeats the purpose of informing employees of their rights when the workers cannot read English. There are efforts to overcome this. Some agencies have translated flyers and pamphlets into Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Malaysian and Korean. Large-scale production and wide distribution of such material are necessary steps in educating Asian employers and workers, but the dissemination of information alone is insufficient.

When low-income Asian Americans attempt to report a violation, they are confronted with complicated and confusing bureaucratic process. As stated before, filing a complaint is a disconcerting experience even for a person who is educated and speaks English. For workers who only speak an Asian language or have a poor command of the English language, the process is an even more frustrating and intimidating.

Imagine trying to collect back wages by seeking the help of a government agency. At the agency's office, you are intimidated by the indifference of the government representative who is impatient with your inability to speak English. All the brochures and forms are in English. Once the forms are completed, you fall through the cracks and cannot get help because there is not enough staff to handle your case. (Lee, 1992, p. 97).

There are only a few Asian translators, who mainly speak Chinese or Vietnamese; consequently, many with limited English ability have faced a nearly insurmountable barrier in filing a complaint.

Beyond the inadequate information and limited bilingual service is a more fundamental problem. Many fear losing their job if they complain to an official government agency:

If the complainant still works for the company and the boss finds out that you tried to stand up for rights, you will get fired. Learning about rights and actively exercising them can have dangerous implications. (Lee, 1992, p. 97)

The types of employment available to low-income Asian Americans are already unstable, and for some, having a bad job is better than having no job. Because the weakness in the enforcement system and the lack of viable employment opportunities, employers often can use unfair labor practices with impunity at the expense of workers.

The Role of CBOs

Many of the problems and limitations of job training and workers' rights can only be addressed by the state or federal governments, but CBOs can nonetheless play an important role in helping low-income Asian Americans workers. Given the ethnic and cultural nature of the

specific issues facing this group, Asian CBOs with their bilingual/bicultural staff and location within the community are in a unique position to be direct providers of training and information, and to be advocates for these workers. Compared to state agencies, CBOs are less intimidating for recent immigrants and refugees.

In the area of disseminating information, CBOs should be a clearinghouse on training opportunities, tax credits, labor laws, and safety and health regulations. CBOs should increase their efforts to refer eligible individuals to job training and education classes available through nearby schools and other agencies. Employers should be given information on the Targeted Jobs Tax Credit discussed earlier. Interviews with Asian American CBOs show no concerted effort to encourage wider usage of TJTC subsidies by firms. At the same time, low-wage workers need to know that they may be entitled to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EIC), which provides a refundable tax credit to working parents with modest incomes (Hoffman, 1990, p.7). In the area of workers' rights, CBOs can distribute translated pamphlets to both employers and employees, and can assist government agencies such as Cal/OSHA and other enforcement agencies by sponsoring workshops on workers rights.

CBOs should help workers who want to form labor unions or coalitions to improve working conditions, wages or benefits. The founding of the national Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance in 1992 has improved Asian American participation in the U.S. labor movement, but more grass-roots organizing is needed. A model of community-based labor organizing is the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA), which seeks to empower and educate Korean immigrant workers on basic workers' rights through education, the provision of related services, advocacy, and organizing.

CBOs should expand their provision of job training within their respective communities. Some Asian CBOs have been involved in job training for over a decade (Aguilar, 1993), but the demand for this service has grown dramatically with the new immigration. Where appropriate, job training should be integrated with the broad programmatic efforts discussed in the other two chapters in this section of the book -- small business development and construction of affordable housing. This integration would increase the effectiveness of the individual programs. An example of this is Asian Neighborhood Design in San Francisco, where workers are trained in construction skills through projects that produce furniture and housing for the community. Similarly, CBOs can combine programs that improve the

viability of small Asian-owned businesses and train workers, while using tax credit to cover some of the costs.

Finally, CBOs must act as advocates. This is done by assisting individuals who are having difficulties securing assistance from existing governmental agencies. The role of advocate, however, is broader than this ombudsman-type activity. Because CBOs are in a position to witness the weaknesses in job training programs and the enforcement of labor laws, they should take on the responsibility of informing government administrators of the deficiencies. For example, they should play a role in helping agencies set priorities for funding and for investigation and enforcement.

Recommendations and Strategies

Activities at the community level must be complemented by efforts to change national and state policies. Specifically:

1. The needs and concerns of low-income people, including low-income Asian Americans, must be integrated into the current effort by the U.S. Department of Labor to formulate a new manpower agenda to meet the challenges of an integrated global economy. We applaud the concept of continuous upgrading of skills, which is designed to increase worker productivity and keep the United States competitive. When this approach is applied to disadvantaged populations, it provides an avenue of continuous upward mobility.
2. There must be a broader view of the function of job training. We accept the concept of job training as an investment to increase the productivity of workers based on an economic-efficiency criterion. However, the returns must also be seen in social terms. All people should be given an opportunity to become productive citizens. Job training programs must include a component that enables providers to work with high-risk individuals.
3. Programs that provide economic incentives for the private sector to hire the disadvantaged must be

revised so more of those trapped in low-wage jobs are eligible. To prevent potential abuses of tax credits, there must be training requirements for firms receiving subsidies.

4. Welfare policies should provide greater incentives and support for those who can work. We must dismantle the system where working is economically an undesirable choice for many low-income adults. This should be done not by penalizing the poor but by giving greater assistance to the working poor. This includes larger refunds through the Earned Income Tax Credits so that these workers can have a decent standard of living.
5. The institutional framework to ensure that workers are protected from unfair labor practices must be rebuilt. The national and state agencies that oversee the enforcement of labor laws were seriously weakened during the 1980s. There is now an opportunity to strengthen these institutions, but in doing so, we must insist that they provide equal access to all workers, regardless of ethnicity.