unsung heroes
Sheds Light on the Value of Our Work

We save lives and prevent injuries
SHERI ANDERSON
Safety Analyst
S.F. Municipal Transit Authority

We make sure taxes are fair
JULIE FORD
Property Appraiser
City Hall

We facilitate excellent patient care
BUNDIT DHARMASUKRIT
Information Systems Administrator
San Francisco General Hospital

We give back to those who serve our country
SAM ROSALES
Health Services Administrator
County Detention Health Services

We keep our jails and staff safe
TRAVIS NELSON
Veterans Services Representative
Veterans Services Department

We prevent traffic accidents and fatalities
SHERRI ANDERSON
Safety Analyst
S.F. Municipal Transit Authority

We shelter animals from cruelty
NANCY ANDERSON
Animal Services Lieutenant
Animal Services Department

We save lives and prevent injuries
SAM ROSALES
Health Services Administrator
County Detention Health Services

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Countering Myths About Public Employees is Essential

In connection with the City and County of San Francisco negotiations and mediation/arbitration, Local 21 developed a campaign to educate civic leaders about the important work public employees do, and to help leverage our bargaining power. The campaign, slated to roll out to other jurisdictions going into bargaining, has been well received by members and elected officials.

Hopefully it will make a meaningful impression on the public at large. To date, it is more innovative and creative than anything our Local has ever attempted.

Meanwhile, at the national level public union members are being branded as lazy pension-cheats. The Koch Brothers, Sheldon Adelson, and numerous other G.O.P. supporters are bankrolling this right-wing effort. Together, they’re buying billions of dollars worth of carefully calibrated propaganda. Even more alarming, it’s just one step in a carefully orchestrated campaign against workers that has been patiently executed over the last several decades.

Invaluable professionals or greedy, overpaid workers? These competing narratives can’t peacefully co-exist. One will inevitably win over the other unless there is a drastic change in policies and philosophies of the “deus ex machina” variety. Barring such a miracle, it’s not going to be pretty. The headwind we’re fighting is turning into a typhoon against workers that has been patiently executed over the last several decades.

What can workers do? Countering anti-worker, anti-union propaganda through political and media strategies is essential. Using our numbers to organize for phone-banks and precinct-walks is just one part of the battle for public opinion and the legislation it informs.

To win the war, we need to follow suit and stand up like the founders of the labor movement and the longshoreman and teamsters who bucked the corporations in the 1930s. It’s now or never: We’ve got to read the writing on the wall and take action.

“Local 21 developed a campaign to educate civic leaders...and to help leverage our bargaining power.”
Cuts Take Hold, Focus Shifts to Future Revenue

The Governor signed the budget on time for the second year in a row. California’s implementation of health care reform is moving along faster than anywhere in the country now that the Supreme Court has upheld the Affordable Care Act. From a distance, it appears California is on the mend. Up close, we can see the fractures left by structural deficits and an election cycle that leaves much up to chance.

The Governor and Legislature were charged with balancing a budget with a $15.7 billion deficit, amid poor revenue intake. Republicans’ strident refusal to support new revenue left state leaders no choice but to balance the budget on the backs of the poor by cutting another $8 billion from social services. To stave off future damage, the Governor qualified a tax initiative for the November ballot that would raise enough money to fill the gap and provide a reserve. If it fails, it will mean drastic cuts to our already faltering public education system.

Local agencies took a smaller hit than in recent budget cycles, but years of cutting programs and funding has taken its toll. It will take years to recuperate.

Following the dissolution of Redevelopment Agencies statewide, cities bore the brunt of absorbing work and employees while dealing with unanswered questions about how funding could be reallocated and what obligations are enforceable. The Governor’s Redevelopment clean up bill finally addressed some of those issues. Cities and counties are now left with great responsibility, while the state holds decision-making authority.

The Court system took another big blow in this year’s budget. Local 21 is supporting legislation that would facilitate bringing money into local trial courts to ensure a continuation of the services our members work hard to provide. However, any such legislation, if passed, would not impact this year’s budget cycle.

With months until the November election, it’s too early to predict the outcome of the Governor’s tax initiative. To date, it has a slight lead in the polls but faces an uphill battle with ardent opposition and high profile funders bankrolling a no campaign.

Both the Legislature and Governor have proposed changes to retirement for public employees, which will not be decided until 2013. Californians for Retirement Security, a public employee coalition to which Local 21 belongs, has raised important critiques of the proposals for the approaches they use to curb pension system abuses. The non-partisan Legislative Analyst’s Office has urged the Legislature to take time to thoughtfully develop solutions that do not cause as many problems as they solve. Both groups want to ensure that any proposals do not undermine retirement security for the millions of Californians in public pensions.

A new version of “paycheck deception,” now dubbed “special exemptions,” will make its third appearance on November’s ballot. If passed, it would significantly limit unions’ ability to raise funds for political issues impacting their members. While the legislation would silence our voice in politics, it would allow the wealthiest 1% an exemption, enabling banks, insurance companies, and multinational corporations to make unlimited campaign contributions to elect candidates who will go after our healthcare, the right to negotiate working conditions and wages, and grant more tax loopholes.
Over the past few years, Local 21 has undergone a transformation. We’ve developed a social media presence, revamped our website, and upgraded our aesthetic to better reflect the caliber and type of work our members do.

In the face of one of the worst recessions in history, we began seeing increasing attacks on our wages and benefits beyond the scale of legitimate budget problems. Knowing that any successful defense has to employ myriad strategies for fighting back, we started a campaign to improve civic leaders’ understanding of who we are and the work we do, in addition to our efforts at the ballot box and bargaining table.

Strategies highlight members’ irreplaceable knowledge, experience, and passion

We launched “21 Unsung Heroes” to shed light on Local 21 members’ contributions to our communities through public service. Timed to coincide with the San Francisco chapters’ contract negotiations, the program served as an invaluable tool to highlight our members’ irreplaceable knowledge, experience, and passion for their work. It was a positive way to indirectly put pressure on and educate City decision makers.

“Unsung Heroes” refers to our members’ work behind the scenes to serve residents. Whether it’s ensuring our water supply is clean, making buildings safe and accessible, or helping trauma patients regain their physical mobility, the public knows little about our integral role in providing the services they rely on.

“The campaign made our members and the City aware of the range of work we do, and the range of heroes in our Union’s ranks,” said Adam Gubser, Local 21 member and Transit Planner. “It fostered a sense of pride and connectedness between us as union members, and with the public.”

“21 Unsung Heroes” ads appeared in BART stations, Muni stops, and on buses. Packets with member profiles were mailed to members and local elected and civic leaders, and a number of heroes visited San Francisco Board of Supervisors members to talk about the work they’ve done in each district. Several Supervisors honored select heroes for their contributions to the community.

Union produces video series, addresses issues at bargaining table

In addition to profiling members, the union also produced a series of videos to highlight our members while simultaneously addressing issues at the bargaining table.

After the initial pilot program concluded in San Francisco, we’re turning our attention to Contra Costa County where the Union’s growing membership faces a difficult contract campaign and little recognition from civic leaders. Putting a face on our union’s membership will help build...
“The campaign made our members and the City aware of the range of work we do, and the range of heroes in our Union’s ranks. It fostered a sense of pride and connectedness between us as union members, and with the public.”

said chapter President Sue Guest. “People don’t know what we do and how important our work is. They don’t know that we’re responsible for building roads that safely connect residents to businesses, for ensuring children are healthy and receive their immunizations. We need to educate the Board and the public about the crucial services we provide.”

For more information on the 21 Unsung Heroes campaign, visit www.21unsungheroes.org.
Robert Reich Talks to Local 21 About Labor, the Economy, and Our Future

In an exclusive video interview with Local 21, Former Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich answered questions from Local 21 members about what is wrong with the economy, what President Obama should do to fix it, and what labor could do to turn the tides in favor of working class people.

Watch the full interview at youtu.be/EQo-OLkzKU4 and read the excerpts below.

Robert Reich: Organized labor is the most important force for progressive change in this country. Unfortunately, the ranks are lower than in the 1950s when a third of the American workforce belonged to a union. Now in the private sector, fewer than 8% of employees belong to unions. In the public sector it’s better, but still not enough to give American workers the voice and bargaining leverage they need.

Local 21: Was the stimulus package large enough? It seemed that a lot of dollars were used to plug holes and not add to new projects. Was that the purpose or was it misdirected?

Robert Reich: It wasn’t misdirected. The whole point is when there is unemployment, the private sector is not expanding jobs, and consumers are scared, government needs to step in and spend more until the economy grows again.

Local 21: What are the big issues Obama and Romney clash on, and where do you think voters will fall?

Robert Reich: What’s the best way to get jobs, growth, and wages back to what they were. Republicans still believe in trickle down economics. If you give tax breaks to corporations and wealthy people, somehow that’s going to help everybody else. We know that doesn’t work. The Bush tax cuts did not trickle down. We had fewer jobs and lower wages after Bush’s cuts. Clinton raised taxes, invested in education, jobs, and infrastructure. We created 22 million jobs, the economy took off, and wages went up. The Republican view of trickle down economics is wrong. You can only build economies from the bottom up, you can’t build from the top down.
Golden Gate Workers Perservere, Use Collective Strength to Secure Gains

More than 350 Golden Gate Bridge employees, united in a labor coalition co-chaired by Local 21, had been fighting for a new contract since April of 2011 to keep healthcare affordable. After more than one year at the bargaining table our Allied and Engineering chapter members at the Bridge District ratified new contracts, along with other unions in the coalition.

The new agreement represented a hard fought conclusion to a difficult bargaining campaign where Bridge District management demanded concessions, bargained in bad faith, rewarded unrepresented employees for not being unionized, and galvanized the coalition of 17 unions to become more unified than ever before. Together we held rallies, picket lines, walk-outs, and actions garnering national media attention.

“Bargaining, albeit long and tedious, was a distinct learning process for me with respect to the politics of the process,” said Davie Wendt, Art Director/Graphic Designer. “The most disheartening part was the fact that the District gave unrepresented employees a raise, while negotiating to take away benefits from the coalition. I feel this contributed to a rift between represented and non-represented employees, but also helped build a stronger relationship with the other unions.”

Even with the District’s divisive tactics, members were satisfied with the final contract. The agreement provided a $500 signing bonus and three 2% wage increases, as well as important wins for long-term District employees, those requiring ergonomic assessments, and Engineers who work overtime in emergencies. The District also modified its healthcare coverage for domestic partners to ease the unfair tax burden for those who cannot legally marry in California.

San Jose Chapters Fight Illegal Pension Cuts, Hold City Accountable

The City of San Jose continues to be a national hotbed of anti-public employee activities. For three years, our San Jose Chapters have been fighting against carefully orchestrated assaults on wages, working conditions, and benefits. Mayor Chuck Reed led a raid that culminated in the passage of Measure B in June. Fueled by intentionally false information about the City’s pension costs, the initiative allows the City Council to illegally change employee pension, healthcare, and disability benefits.

Immediately following the election, Local 21 and its coalition partners from the Police and Fire unions filed lawsuits detailing the legal flaws with Measure B, including violating the contracts clause of the California Constitution. The City will not implement Measure B until further notice from the state court.

Politically driven, Measure B was championed by the City even though unions offered several lawful pension reform proposals that achieved the financial savings needed by the City.

In addition to Measure B, the City continues the assault on other benefits. Our chapters are in mediation over sick leave payout because the City wants to eliminate the earned, accrued benefit. In June, the City Council also approved a new healthcare plan that drastically reduces coverage and increases costs for current and future retirees.

These unilateral, illegal actions are on top of other reductions employees have already given, including an ongoing 10% cut in total compensation, additional pension contributions, and increases in healthcare premiums and co-pays. Give-back demands will undoubtedly keep coming when our MOU expires in 2013.

“When NBC Bay Area News exposed the City’s erroneous claim that retirement costs would soon reach $650 million annually, Local 21 took an active role in holding Reed responsible via ethics hearings and the SEC and fiduciary lawsuits,” said Matt Farrell, CAMP Board member. “Our leaders and members became inspired by the strength of our Union to keep moving forward in very dire times. It showed that our Union is actively involved in holding elected officials and the City administration accountable.”

Not only has the City Council’s actions devastated worker morale, but they have sent hundreds of loyal, dedicated, and skilled employees into early retirement or out the door to positions in neighboring cities.

For more on San Jose and Measure B, visit ifpte21.org/content/san-joese-illegal-measure-b.
San Francisco Members’ Visibility, Strength Achieve Results in Bargaining

The agreement was overwhelmingly ratified by 93% of the membership from all twenty-two San Francisco chapters, demonstrating our team’s success in reaching an intelligent and equitable settlement.

Despite the positive end result, much of negotiations felt like an uphill battle. The City was asking for continuing furlough days and huge increases to medical premiums. The economists Local 21 retained present reports showing the City’s rapidly improving budget and ability to afford modest wage increases, in contrast to city negotiators’ claim that any increase would cause major financial hardship.

“There is a fine line between compromise and capitulation, and our bargaining sessions drove that point home,” said Gus Vallejo, IT chapter President and Local 21 Bargaining Team member. “The City started negotiations with talk about more givebacks. Our team stood unified that we deserve a raise and the City could afford it, and we had the research to prove our case.”

To support our efforts at the table, Local 21 launched a full-scale campaign to inform civic leaders and the public about who we are and the work we do.

Our “21 Unsung Heroes” campaign featured profiles and photos of members in BART stations and bus shelters. For the first time our members, city residents, and elected leaders learned about the important work we do and were able to connect a human face to the often stereotyped and misjudged “public employee.”

In addition to increasing our visibility around the city, we increased our prominence in the workplace with a hoodie and button campaign. Members wore their unsung heroes hoodies and “buttoned up” every Tuesday and Friday, when the Local 21 team was at the bargaining table.

“The unsung heroes and “button up” campaign inspired us to work harder than ever before to defend and improve the rights and benefits our union has negotiated over the years,” said Mary Marzotto, San Francisco Vice President and Bargaining Team member. “It also showed the City that our members were united in demanding a fair contract. We were visible in the workplace and across the City — everywhere they looked they saw our strength and the important work we do.”

Cris de la Paz was one of 24 SF bargaining team members who sat at the table from February to April of this year.

Our San Francisco chapters went to the bargaining table for the first time in six years, after three years of concessions to help save jobs and services. Following a unique negotiation process that culminated in mediation-arbitration, the Union and City settled on a two-year agreement that provides three 1% raises, a one-time award of two additional paid floating holidays, and numerous language improvements. The only concession was a modest increase in contributions to health care for medically single employees.