



RURAL CALIFORNIA

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR RURAL STUDIES *REPORT*

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Labor Rights Take a Hit

Supreme Court Denies Undocumented Worker Back Pay

Jose Castro wanted to improve conditions for himself and his fellow workers at Hoffman Plastic Compounds, Inc. And so he began distributing union authorization cards in May 1988 at the company's Los Angeles plant in support of a campaign by the AFL-CIO. But one month later the company suddenly laid off Castro and several others, marking the beginning of a long drama that would last 14 years and lead all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) investigated the layoffs, and in 1992 it determined that Hoffman had attempted to purge union supporters from its ranks—a violation of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). The NLRB ordered the company to reinstate Castro and four other workers and provide back pay for lost wages. The company agreed to abide

(see Back Pay, page 7)



Marchers celebrate the "other" Labor Day. Find out why there are two days to honor workers on page 10.



Doug Mihok

Hmong native costumes were among the colorful sights at the first annual Tamejavi Festival.

Tamejavi Festival Brings It All Together

Immigrant groups in the Central Valley gathered to celebrate the first annual Tamejavi Festival in Fresno on April 26-28. The highly successful event, which attracted hundreds of attendees, highlighted the diversity and richness of the Central Valley. For three days, the Tower District of Fresno was alive with the spirit of tradition and culture, while participants

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This issue is dedicated to CIRS Board President Joel Levinson, who was in an automobile accident in May. Despite sustaining serious injuries, he is making a remarkable recovery. The CIRS staff extend their best wishes for a speedy recovery to Joel and his family.



Clockwise from upper left: 1) *The Blues, Fresno Style*; 2) *West African rhythms of ALTA on the Tamejavi stage*; 3) *Swaziland vendor displays her batiks*; 4) *Taking in the show*; 5) *Bamba de Hoz de Cuevas from Oaxaca, Mexico gets brassy*. (Photos by Marcus Clarke)

Festival

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learned about topics both informative and empowering.

The Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship and the Civic Action Network organized the event. These groups include a number of organizations funded by the James Irvine Foundation, which work together to increase civic participation among underrepresented groups. Approximately one year ago, the organizations recognized a distinct lack of public arenas in which to share and celebrate culture in the community. They vowed to change it.

"When the Central Valley Partnership and Civic Action Network were having workshops on different methodologies of engaging immigrant civic participation," says Erica Kohl, one of the festival organizers,

"we became amazed at how connected different cultures are in their motivation for coming to this country, and the obstacles they face while adapting to their new home. We discovered the power of cultural sharing and how a public space for this can inform and encourage a new way of thinking."

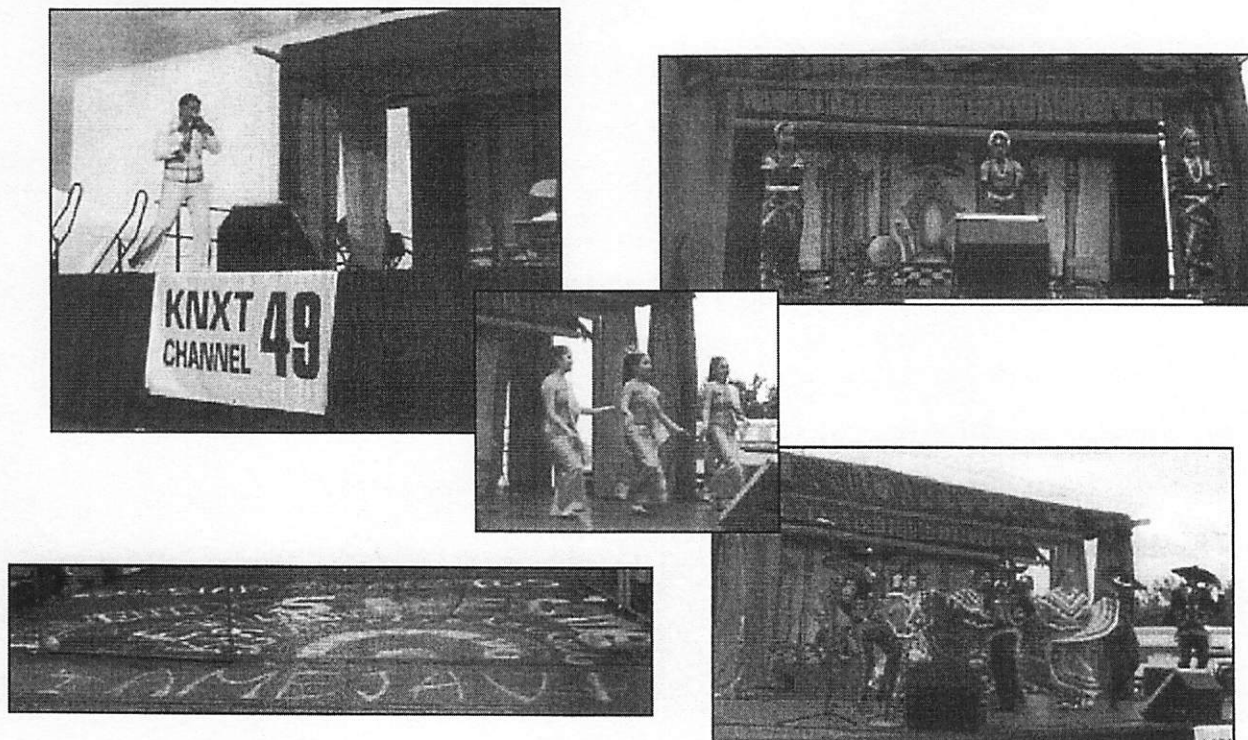
To underscore this commonality, organizers invented a title for the event that uses parts of the Hmong, Spanish, and Mixteco words for marketplace (namely, *taj laj tshav puam*, *mercado*, and *nunjav*). The name itself thus honors the three main immigrant groups in the valley.

Sights and Sounds

The festival's outdoor and indoor

stages were packed with an incredible program, featuring both local and international talent. "I really enjoyed Tou Ger Xiong, the storyteller," said Nikary Plaza, a Fresno resident. "He [Xiong] encouraged other Hmong people to pursue whatever dreams they might have, and used a unique way of incorporating different cultural expressions to communicate the message."

Festival attendees had all of their senses occupied, as the outdoor marketplace had over 30 booths of community resource information and food and art from all corners of the world. On either of the two outdoor stages, the audience could experience Oaxacan indigenous dance, Cambodian opera, traditional West



Clockwise from upper left: 1) Rapper-storyteller Tou Ger Xiong from Minnesota on the Tamejavi stage; 2) Hmong dancers from the Central Valley; 3) Bharathanatyam, an Indian classical dance troupe from Fresno; 4) Mariachi performers dazzle the audience; 5) Welcome to Tamejavi. (Photos by Doug Mihok)

African drumming, local Blues, Mexican Mariachi, musical jams, and theatre performances of the immigrant experience.

One of the featured theatre performances was the Exchange Project. This collaboration of three nationally acclaimed theater companies included Junebug Productions, an African American theatre company from Louisiana; Teatro Pregones, a Puerto Rican ensemble from New York; and Roadside Theater, an Appalachian theatre ensemble from Kentucky.

After seeing them perform, Allen James of Madera commented, "The Exchange Project touched on several social issues. The performance made me think about how community involvement of immigrants and

people of color is often hindered by the tremendous struggle to survive. Too often, different voices become hidden or silenced in America, when there is so much to offer."

The educational exchange at Tamejavi included films, exhibits, and workshops on a variety of topics, such as "Turning Stories into Plays," and "The Immigrant Path Towards Civic Participation." With great participation and turnout at these and other aspects of the festival, the organizers felt like the hard work of planning definitely paid off.

Lourdes Sevilla, one of the organizers who also works at the Pan Valley Institute in Fresno, which coordinated the event, said, "The outcome of Tamejavi was a great

example of what community can accomplish when they work together." She explained that "there has been desire from the Fresno community to somehow work together in good will and unity and we were successful in this endeavor with Tamejavi."

The Real Deal: Cultural Sharing

Unfortunately, the spirit and purpose of the event was misread by some. The *San Francisco Chronicle* ran an article that cast the festival as a means to assuaging conflict among Central Valley immigrant groups, particularly Southeast Asians.¹

But those who helped create Tamejavi and those who came to participate didn't see it that way. "I don't

(see Festival, page 6)



From left: 1) Oaxacan restaurant waitress; 2) Hmong dolls; 3) Hmong native costume; 4) A day of many smiles (Photos by Marcus Clarke).

Festival

(cont. from page 5)

believe that immigrant groups are constantly fighting or butting heads," says Rafael Flores, a Fresno community organizer from Oaxaca, Mexico. "I do believe that individuals from different cultural groups are not given many opportunities to share experiences and work together. Providing these opportunities are what we need to focus on in the future."

The lack of opportunity to come together was expressed by other participants. Festival organizers set up a booth where they asked attendees, "What would you like to be improved for the Central Valley?" The responses were written and posted up on a larger poster board so that people could look at what was written. One woman from Fresno responded, "I would like to see the Fresno City Council be mindful of what they are doing with the reconstruction of downtown Fresno. There is a lot of potential in what it could be like. They just need to make sure that the downtown is open and accessible to the entire

population of Fresno."

A New Tradition?

The dialogues and sense of community ownership that grew out of Tamejavi inspired festival organizers to explore possibilities for the future.

"It is important that the Fresno community... decides in what capacity it wishes to celebrate this event of cultural sharing," explained organizer Estella Galvan. "We don't want this to be a one-time event. We hope that this event has inspired people to organize other events in their communities, as well as keep the momentum for a second annual Tamejavi." With such a great turnout and positive feedback, Tamejavi may indeed be here to stay.

—Marcus Clarke

Marcus Clarke is CIRS's community research coordinator and principal liaison to the Central Valley Partnership.

NOTES

¹Hendricks, Tyche, "Taming tension: multicultural festival could help unite the Central Valley immigrant community to remedy common ills," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 29, 2002.

Passages

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I have gained a tremendous appreciation for CIRS's critically important role in conducting applied research that directly examines the pressing needs of rural California. In the process, I have been continually inspired by the hard work and dedication to California's underserved residents demonstrated by the staff and the many other organizations who address the same problems through different means.

I would also like to make a special note of appreciation for the support CIRS has received from its funders over the past three years, in particular The California Endowment and the James Irvine Foundation. Without their vision, a vision that recognizes the relevance of applied research to social change, CIRS could not exist. But most of all, as I anticipate my new position, I am gratified by the opportunity to continue working with such a talented cohort of colleagues and friends.

—David Lighthall