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Women, Unions, and "Participative Management": Organizing in the Sunbelt

Louise Lamphere

Guillermo J. Grenier

As more and more working mothers enter the labor force, the structure of industries that employ women is changing. Not only are apparel and electronics firms establishing "runaway shops" in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia, but corporations with branch plants remaining in the United States are "modernizing" their management policies. With the increasing popularity of "quality circles" (adapted from Japanese models), firms have enthusiastically embraced various forms of "participative management"—policies that purport to give workers a measure of control over their work environment. Yet beneath the ethic of participation is often a clear antiunion stance. Women who work in these firms are facing a new workplace where modern plant equipment is often combined with management policies that limit women's ability to organize.

In this article we examine the use of participative management policies during a union drive at a new plant in the Southwest. Since the plant work force was dominantly female and included a large proportion of Hispanic women workers, many of whom were mothers, the case helps us to understand the complex interrelationship between labor activism, gender, and ethnicity. We argue that no one factor accounts for the union's loss by a two-to-one vote. Participative management techniques, the firm's use of legal and illegal antiunion tactics, and the economic vulnerability of young women workers all played a role. In addition, the union's failure to campaign for community support may have been a factor. More important, our interpretation emphasizes the process of the union drive itself and the factors at work in building workers' consciousness of the need for a union, as well as the timing of later management countertactics. A promising start was turned around by a stepped-up, highly orchestrated anti-union campaign.

On the one hand, it could be argued that Hispanic or Chicana women are difficult to unionize because of their lack of commitment to the labor force, language and customs different from mainstream workers, and deference to authority. On the other hand, recent research on Mexican-American women workers in California and Texas has indicated that they have been active participants in early apparel, food processing, and cannery strikes; in farm worker struggles; and in the Farah Strike in the early 1970s.[1] Those who have studied Chicano families have recently attacked the "traditionalism argument," suggesting that women's lack of commitment to the workplace is more an outcome of the lack of opportunity in particular local economies than of adherence to values that keep women at home.[2] Finally, there is evidence that women are no less likely to vote for unions than are men, other conditions being equal.[3]

Certainly, Hispanic women in Sunbelt City[4] do not fit the stereotype of peripheral women workers. Census data indicate that Hispanic women in Sunbelt City entered the labor force in greater numbers between 1960 and 1970, and by 1980 49.8 percent of Hispanic women were working outside the home.[5] In this urban area, few Hispanics are recent immigrants. Many families trace their roots in the state back to early Spanish settlement, most identify themselves as "Spanish" and not as Mexican or Mexican-American, and the majority of those under thirty years of age use English at home and at work. The women we interviewed at HealthTech and other industrial plants are examples of what might be termed the Southwest's "new women workers"—that is, young Hispanic women who are not taking time out to rear their children before returning to the labor force, but who are committed to retaining jobs that are necessary to support their families, even though they have preschool children.

In the case we will discuss, many Hispanic women (along with a number of Anglo and Black women) were able to "see through" the "high-involvement" structure and perceive the need for a union to represent them in gaining higher wages and a real voice in policies. However, union supporters were not able to gain a majority of the needed votes for a union in the face of management's strategies. The reasons lie, we argue, partly in a powerful combination of participative management policies and legal and illegal tactics, and partly in the economic vulnerability of these new women workers.

R. B. Freeman and J. L. Medoff have argued that managers of U.S. firms in recent years have increased their opposition to unions through the use of three strategies: (1) positive labor relations such as wage increases and improvements in fringe benefits; (2) tough legal campaigns to convince workers that they should vote against a union; and (3) illegal actions, such as the firing of union activists.[6] Their review of the literature suggests that the use of legal tactics, particularly leaflets and other communications with workers, the delay of a union election, and the use of consultants to fight unionization all tend to influence the results of an election in the direction of defeating the union.[7] More important, Freeman and Medoff argue that illegal tactics, such as firing workers, have an even more chilling impact on union campaigns. They estimate that unfair labor practices

account for from one-fourth to one-half of the *decline* in the number of National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections won by unions over the past thirty years.[8]

Freeman and Medoff give little attention in their book to "positive labor relations" and their impact on union drives, partly because these are harder to measure than the use of antiunion communication and consultants (as examples of legal campaign practices used by management) and the number and type of NLRB charges filed by a union (as a measure of "illegal" practices). We believe that the new stress on participative management, particularly if it organizes informal social relations in the plant and puts them more under the control of management has the potential of making loyal company supporters out of employees. Participative-management policies are thus a new form of "positive labor relations," one that is possibly as important as fringe-benefit packages, profit sharing, or wage increases in warding off prounion sentiment.

THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

This article has emerged from material collected during two different research projects. In 1982–83, Louise Lamphere was co-principal investigator on a National Sciences Foundation (NSF)–funded project to study the impact of female employment on families where the mother worked full-time in a production-level job in the apparel and electronics industries. Dual-worker couples and single mothers—all with children under school age—were interviewed about their jobs, their work histories, and how they arranged household and child-care tasks in order to cope with the woman's full-time employment.[9] Women workers at HealthTech were included in the study since it was a new plant whose work process was very similar to that of apparel plants.

Permission to interview workers was given after an interview with the plant manager by Peter Evans, a co-principal investigator. The manager then referred project members to the plant's social psychologist. In initial discussions with the psychologist, Lamphere was told that there was a union drive but was asked specifically not to discuss unions with workers. In initial interviews, therefore, Lamphere and her coworkers maintained the role of "detached researchers." Since we had pledged confidentiality to both the plant manager and the employees, we felt we could not turn over names, phone numbers, or interview material to the union organizers, although, as the drive progressed through the last few months of 1982, we became more and more sympathetic with the union cause. Lamphere was not in Sunbelt City during the last months of the campaign but was able to interview several additional workers whose names she got through the union organizer. These later interviews give a better sense of the role of the campaign in the lives of two of the ten women interviewed by those working on the NSF project.

Guillermo J. Grenier's role began as a researcher and was transformed into that of a prounion spokesperson at a crucial juncture in the campaign, although

his research interests remained throughout. During the fall of 1982, Grenier began conducting research on participative-management structures—particularly the "teams" being used at HealthTech—for his doctoral degree in sociology. With the help of the plant social psychologist he was able to observe team meetings and talk with supervisors during the course of the union campaign. In the early months he acted as an unpaid research assistant to the social psychologist, taking up his suggestion to investigate the role that the teams played in the firm's antiunion campaign. When the firm's lawyer became concerned that Grenier's notes might be subpoenaed for an NLRB hearing, Grenier submitted a proposal to the company requesting permission to research "Small Group Dynamics in an Industrial Setting." He informally agreed with the psychologist that he would keep the firm's antiunion strategy as a secondary focus of his research.

As Grenier gathered more information, particularly about the manipulative techniques used in team meetings and the company's firing strategy, he became convinced that there was nothing inherently "proworker" about the new design environment. After a great deal of soul-searching, he spoke out against the activities of the company at a public forum organized by the union in April 1983. His comments resulted in the firing of the social psychologist and were important in eventually gaining a positive judgment from the NLRB concerning a number of worker grievances.

After his public statement, Grenier was barred from the plant, but he was able to conduct interviews with a number of union activists, both male and female. Thus, his data include rich details on management tactics during the campaign as well as postelection analysis by a number of those who sided with the union. Our two roles emerged out of very different circumstances. Lamphere and her coworkers were interviewing workers in their homes, and the structure of their project, plus Lamphere's promise to avoid the topic of unionism, pushed her to collect data only on work and family. Grenier's association with the plant psychologist led him in just the opposite direction and gave him access to information that in turn could be useful for the union. In this article we see these two sets of data as complementary. By focusing on women's work and family lives on the one hand and the team structure and union drive on the other, we are able to analyze the interaction between management and women workers as it was shaped during the course of the union campaign.

THE SETTING

The union drive we analyze took place in 1982 and 1983 in a new branch plant of HealthTech located in Sunbelt City. The city's economy is based primarily on military and government jobs and the city's position as a commercial center. Within the past ten years the city has begun to attract branch plants of large corporations, primarily in apparel and electronics. Recently, several plants have been built with modern equipment, richly carpeted offices, and the latest in com-

puter technology. In addition, a number of plants have introduced aspects of participative management, making Sunbelt City somewhat a "laboratory" for the management of the future.

Thus when HealthTech opened its doors in 1981, it was one of the most innovative plants in the city, operating on what management terms a "high-involvement" philosophy and also hiring a work force that was 90 percent female and 65 percent Hispanic.

The "high-involvement" philosophy at HealthTech had several ingredients. As in two or three other plants in the area, benefits for production and nonproduction employees were equal, there were no time clocks, and the plant had something like "flex-time" in that workers could be late and make up the time at the end of the day. Also, the plant manager maintained an "open-door" policy by which any worker could talk with him about issues of concern. However, HealthTech had gone beyond these forms of participation to completely restructure the labor process around small groups called "teams," which in principle were involved in hiring, training, evaluating, and firing fellow workers.

Workers at the HealthTech plant were involved in making surgical sutures. Trainees learned to attach surgical thread on curved steel needles (a process called "swaging") through the use of "learning curves." Each week the trainee was given a production goal of completing so many dozen swaged needles each day; the number increased until the employee reached "100 percent efficiency." The learning curves used at HealthTech are very similar to production curves used in apparel plants across the country. Although not paid on a piecerate as garment workers are, HealthTech workers were, in effect, pushing against a clock and trying to "make their numbers," increasing their production on a daily basis.

Each department was divided into "production teams" of twelve to fourteen workers. The plant operated on two shifts. Six or seven members of each team worked from 7 A.M. to 3 P.M.; the rest worked evenings from 3 to 11 P.M. The team decided on a rotation schedule, which normally meant that individuals worked two weeks on days and two weeks on nights. Teammates often took breaks or lunch together, and the team met weekly to discuss issues of concern. Building production around small groups meant that management rather than workers created the "informal work" group long ago discovered by the human relations school of management psychology.[10]

In addition, implementation of the "team concept" meant a massive restructuring of the cultural categories through which work and management–worker relations were interpreted. Each team had a "facilitator," not a "supervisor." The "facilitator" was thus not a "boss" but someone who helped improve the interpersonal relationships on the team and aided individuals with their productivity. The team itself was supposed to have an important role in decision making. Two team members interviewed prospective employees (after they had been interviewed by a personnel administrator and the facilitator), and if the

evaluation they brought back to the team meeting was negative, the person was not hired.

Weekly team meetings between the facilitators and workers were held at the time of the shift change (between 2:30 and 3:30 P.M.). A good deal of time was spent in these meetings discussing the production quotas of individual team members and the team as a whole. Whereas in a more traditional plant the supervisor or trainer would be responsible for exhorting the worker to do better, discussion of "numbers" in the team meetings involved the use of negative comments by coworkers, and thus public embarrassment, as methods of motivating a worker to perform better. In addition, as part of the "team support evaluation," team members rated one another on whether they "work hard to reach production."

After a two-month probationary period, and for each six-month period thereafter, team members participated in the evaluation of a new teammate. Evaluations were based on "quality," "quantity," "attendance," and "team support." Each team member filled out a form on the worker being evaluated and checked, among other things, whether that worker showed "a positive attitude toward the job," took an "active part in team evaluations," and understood "the team concept/open communication philosophy." In other words, team members were asked to evaluate their peers on social behavior and attitudes unrelated to the production process itself. These evaluations were discussed in the team meeting, and a poor evaluation sometimes resulted in a raise refusal or a termination (especially at the point of the first evaluation after sixty days of employment).

This redefinition of the work environment—turning bosses into facilitators and workers into "team members" who are peers and who control their work lives—mystifies the hierarchical relations that in fact remain. As our data show, during a union drive workers were carefully screened by management before team members talked to them, firings were initiated by managers and were often carried out without the consent of workers, and the interaction in team meetings was orchestrated by the "facilitator."

WOMEN WORKERS AT HEALTHTECH

During the course of the NSF Sunbelt Industrialization study, we interviewed ten female HealthTech workers. Four were single parents and six were married. Like the other forty-seven women interviewed as part of the project, all had children under school age and all worked full-time in a production job. Economically, the HealthTech workers did not differ significantly from women who worked at apparel and electronics plants in Sunbelt City. All had a history of labor-force participation before obtaining the HealthTech job. Most had worked at low-paying service-sector jobs, and the HealthTech position was the highest-paying and most stable job they had had. Like our other production workers, these women had typically been employed since high school in fast-food restaurants, in chil-

dren's clothing and shoe stores, in day-care centers, or in jobs such as dental assistant or motel maid. Several had some industrial experience as well as a history of jobs in the service sector. They had been employed as sewing machine operator, material sorter, or packer at one of the apparel plants in Sunbelt City. One single mother had been employed for several years at a HealthTech plant in another state and had requested transfer to the new Sunbelt City plant.

The ten HealthTech workers we interviewed were all earning between $5.00 and $5.80 per hour, depending on seniority and shift. The four single parents' salaries (of $10,000–$11,600 a year) were the major support for themselves and their children; all had only one child. However, their pay was not high enough for them to live on their own. One woman lived with her sister and the sister's boyfriend, another with a cousin, a third with her mother, and a fourth with both parents. In the case of the six married workers, the woman's salary contributed almost half or, in two cases, more than half of the couple's income. In three couples the husband had faced several months of unemployment during 1982, so that in these three families the wife's employment at HealthTech was a particularly critical stabilizing factor. Family incomes ranged from $12,500 to $23,600 per year; three of the couples were classified in our larger study as being in a "precariously stable" economic position and three as being in a "stable" position. Median income for the thirty-eight couples (twenty-three Hispanic and fifteen Anglo) in our larger study was $22,300. In other words, the Health-Tech women tended to be in families with incomes in the lower half of our sample and in situations where the husbands' jobs were less stable and the wives' hourly pay not as high as the pay in some of the electronics and electrical equipment plants. For both single parents and couples, female employment was an absolutely crucial aspect of the family's economic situation.

Of the ten women interviewed, five supported the union and five did not. Since the final union vote was 141 against the union and 71 for the union, our sample is biased in the direction of union supporters. However, since we were not focusing on the union issue, we did not realize until writing this article that our sample included proportionately more union supporters than found in the work force. The ten women, however, represent the range of participation in the drive—including a very vocal antiunionist, two members of the union organizing committee, and several women who were quiescent during the campaign.

Among the ten women we spoke with, our interviews show that there were few significant differences in their attitudes toward being a working mother. Instead, feelings about their jobs had been deeply influenced by their own work experiences and by the union campaign. In other words, the interview data suggest that women bring to work quite similar views about how work and family fit or do not fit together, but that attitudes toward the job are shaped in the workplace. These women were committed to both their roles as workers and their roles as mothers, which created some ambivalence when the two roles came into conflict. For example, all ten agreed or strongly agreed that "women need to

work to help their families keep up with the high cost of living." Most agreed (but not strongly) that "working is an important part of my life that would be hard for me to give up." In addition, most felt (though not strongly) that "even if I didn't need the money, I would continue to work." All agreed or strongly agreed that "I feel that anybody who works in my line of work ought to feel good about herself." All these items indicated the importance of working outside the home.

Other items, however, showed that being a mother often conflicted with being a worker. For example, all felt that "working mothers miss the best years of their children's lives." They also felt the pressures of the "double day." All but one interviewee agreed (or strongly agreed) that "I have sometimes felt it was unfair that I have to work and also spend so much time taking care of my home and my children." They also agreed that "I sometimes think I cannot do enough for my family when I work." On the other hand, all but two felt that "family responsibilities have *not* interfered with my getting ahead at work." In other words, both union and nonunion supporters in our sample were committed to jobs outside the home but felt the pressures of combining two roles, feeling the double-burden of housework and child care and regretting not being able to spend more time with their children.

Union and nonunion supporters differed more in how they felt about their HealthTech jobs. The views of union supporters had in several cases been influenced by the campaign itself and some of the issues that had been raised about wages and conditions during its course. For one supporter of the union, her treatment by management during the campaign led her to quit her job after the union lost the election.

Union supporters and nonunion supporters valued the same aspects of work. For example, nine of the ten listed job security among the top three important aspects of any job. Good pay and ease of getting to and from work were the next most important attributes, whereas "good supervisors," "opportunities for promotion," "challenging work," and "no conflicts with family responsibilities" were each mentioned only twice.

In contrast, union supporters had a much more negative view of their HealthTech jobs, feeling that their jobs were less secure (perhaps because of their union support) and that they were not well paid. Nonunion supporters were overwhelmingly positive about their jobs, all five feeling that their positions had job security ("very true") and high pay ("very true" or "true"). They also felt that they had good supervisors and opportunities for promotion. They were slightly more positive about their jobs in terms of how little they conflicted with family responsibilities and how challenging the work was. Three union supporters felt strongly that schedules that demanded working on alternating shifts conflicted with their family responsibilities, and one felt that she was unable to work at her own pace because of the pressure to meet production goals ("pressure in meeting numbers"). Three union supporters felt it was "not true" or "not true at all" that they had a good supervisor.

ACTIVISM FOR AND AGAINST THE UNION: LUCILLE, BONNIE, AND ANNETTE

The similarity in our interviewees' economic situation and attitudes toward combining work and motherhood, and their differences in on-the-job experience suggest that attention should be focused on the workplace and management's strategies during the campaign. The interaction between the work process, the team structure, and the facilitators' tactics to curb union support reveal a great deal about the forces that shaped the range of support and nonsupport for a union that was evidenced in our small sample. This range of opinion and activism can best be illustrated by contrasting Lucille, an antiunion interviewee, with Bonnie and Annette, both strong union supporters.

Both Lucille and Bonnie were among the first workers hired when the HealthTech firm moved to Sunbelt City during 1981. Lucille, an Hispanic, and Bonnie, an Anglo, were both mothers of three children. Neither husband had a good-paying job and both women's HealthTech incomes were a major source of support for the family. Both Lucille and Bonnie were chosen from more than nine hundred initial applicants and were on the first teams formed. Lucille was assigned to Drill Swaging (Team A) and Bonnie to Channel Swaging (Team A).[11]

Lucille learned the drill-swaging technique quickly and was asked to train new employees in the drill department in March. She continued training until December 1981 and then began a period of thirteen weeks' "demonstration" (that is, swaging and winding the newly attached needles and thread at 100 percent efficiency for a period of thirteen weeks). Lucille was the first person in the plant to "demonstrate," and she found the pressure severe. She felt that people on her team were not supportive and that she was not given credit or praise for finishing her demonstration (and getting a raise). This did not dampen her overall enthusiasm for her job, however; she gave her work top ratings on all aspects from pay to supervisor to job security.

Lucille described what she liked about the job:

> What do I like about it? . . . Feeling important as far as what we are making and how it associates with other people. . . . I like everything about that job. The management people, they are so nice, they are just so down-to-earth people. They are not really your bosses as much as your friends. They have never taken that superior attitude over us. Never. They don't have any more benefits than we do. Their benefits are equal to ours . . . . They have an open-door policy. Any time we want to, we can go up and talk to them.

Not only did Lucille do well on her job and feel positively about the management, but she also had a positive assessment of the team structure. She had no difficulty rotating shifts (working both days and evenings, usually two weeks at each); she enjoyed the team meetings and felt positively about her role in hiring decisions: "I really enjoy them . . . Because you get to communicate real good

with the people on your own team, plus with your facilitator, and you get input with everything that goes on. There is really nothing that you can't talk about in your team meeting."

Lucille also responded positively to her role in interviewing prospective workers: "I interviewed most of the first people that got hired. . . . It was fun. I'd never done it before and it was really interesting and I really enjoyed it. I highly recommend it."

With these opinions about the company, the participative management policies, and the team system, it is not surprising that Lucille took an active role against the union when it became an issue. She described how the union issue emerged in her team:

> Well, there was quite a bit of conflict, because there was a couple on our team that wanted the union. And the rest didn't want the union, and there was some that didn't care one way or the other or didn't know enough about it to care. . . . We changed the minds of the ones that wanted the union . . . about six or seven weeks ago. . . . The union stopped being pushy. They are being really quiet. I don't know what they are planning, but they are being really quiet. What we did was, several of us from different departments got together and started an antiunion committee. And we had our own meetings and passed our own flyers.

Bonnie's experiences were quite different. At first she was quite nervous about doing well in her job.

> I was really scared at first. Because it's very tedious, you know. Right down into the machine. It really took me a month or so to get into it. I really thought I was going to lose it. . . . All that producing. You only had so many days to produce that much. And if you don't make it . . . well, "goodbye." So I was really kind of panicked, but I picked up on it. . . . There was so much to learn that it was really quite scary.

However, Bonnie did well enough to become a trainer of new employees. She was only one of two of the original twelve team members who was still employed by the spring of 1983. Since the Channel Swaging job was harder than Drill Swaging, taking eighteen months to master, and since Bonnie spent a good deal of time training others, she had not gone through her demonstration period by the time her third child was born in April 1983 (two years after she was hired).

Bonnie initially responded favorably to team philosophy. As Bonnie said, "I thought it was kind of nice. It might be kind of fun. It was all new to me: to have somebody . . . if you had a problem in your team you could have somebody to help you out." However, Bonnie became disillusioned by the team process. The facilitator for the Channel Department Teams A and B (who was later fired) often tried to provoke conflict among workers. In addition, Bonnie felt it

was embarrassing for the workers to have to justify their low production numbers or explain their troubles with the machines during a public meeting. Bonnie described the meetings of Team A.

> And he was always on us about numbers. It was always his job if our numbers didn't come up. And why did we do so poorly that week. And we'd have to go around the table. And I really hated that. If your numbers were 80 percent for the week and the week before, and that week you did only 67 percent, you know, "Why did you do 67 percent? You are supposed to be at 80." At the time our machines seemed to be breaking down constantly. Down time [would count against us]. But yes, well, that got to be kind of an "old excuse."

Participating in a firing was also a difficult process for Bonnie. She described her feelings about firing one male team member who had been unable to meet his production quotas.

> Well, it's terrible. That person is sitting right there. . . . It was for his numbers. He really was a good worker and a good person . . . to get along with and everything. But his numbers weren't there. He'd had some trouble with his machine, and I guess it had just gotten down to the wire and they had to fire him. I guess we all agreed that if this was what we are supposed to do, we've got to do it. If you don't make your numbers, you've got to go. Either [the facilitator's] going to fire him or the team was going to fire him, and that was one of our things, . . . knowing that we would have to hire and fire . . . hoping that we would never have to fire. . . . It was awful.

On the whole, Bonnie liked her job, but she often felt that there were some unfair aspects of the production system, such as having difficulties with the machine and "lost time" count against her in meeting her production quotas.

> I enjoyed the job. Because it was kind of a challenge. I always . . . like I say, I always watch the clock. If I could do something in 25 minutes or less, I felt real good about it. . . . I did not like when my machine broke down. Or if I had to do re-work. I did not like that counted against me. I didn't think that it was my fault that the machine broke down and I had to work on it . . . but I enjoyed the people there.

By the summer of 1982, several members of Channel A and B were having doubts similar to Bonnie's about the participatory nature of the team structure. Their expectations that the team concept would create a positive kind of work environment were not fulfilled. They found that workers' advice concerning improvements was not heeded, and many came to feel that the team philosophy was a "charade," especially when they were given lines to rehearse in preparation for a plant tour by visiting executives.

Late in June 1982, six workers from Teams A and B formed an organizing committee with the goal of unionization. By July 27, a group of fifteen workers had written to the plant manager that they favored a union and asked for a debate to take place on the issue of unionization. These workers included Bonnie and three of her female teammates from Channel Team A, three workers from Channel Team B, four from the Devices Department, and one from the Vault Department. Three members of the Drill Department, including two of Lucille's teammates, signed the letter. Since most were from the earliest group of employees hired and almost half were from the Channel Department (the most difficult job with the most demanding production numbers and the most production problems), these workers had begun to develop a critique of how production was administered in the plant. In addition, a number had begun to "see through" the team structure. Possibly because of the way in which the facilitator of Channel Teams A and B administered his teams, workers felt that their participation was only on the surface and actually under the control of management.

Through the next few months, support for the union grew. A union organizer from the national office began to contact workers, emphasizing the high wages at other unionized company plants even though there were few differences in the cost of living. The organizing committee began to pass out leaflets, and by October 25, when a signed leaflet was handed out, the committee's membership had expanded to include twenty-one workers. Sixteen were women, including ten Hispanic women, four Anglos, one Black, and one Asian woman. All five men were Hispanic. Again, about half of the committee members (eleven) were from Channels A and B; several more had been added from Drill (two on Team C and one on Team F), but support in the Devices Department had dropped, and the committee had lost the male worker in the Vault Department. The teams in Channel were becoming strongholds, and there was now additional scattered support in other departments.

Annette was one of the new members of Team B who signed the October 25 leaflet, the day after it was handed out. She was an Hispanic single parent, who was living with her sister and her sister's boyfriend, and whose $5.62-an-hour job was supporting her and her four-year-old son. She and one other team member worked permanently on the evening shift, which allowed her team members more weeks on days in the overall rotation schedule. At the time of our interview, she had been having machine problems and her numbers were low. "When gut first came in to Channel Swaging, I was the first one to work with it. I had to learn. The facilitator had me trying different dyes to find out which dyes the needles worked best with and stuff like that. So my numbers dropped then, too." Along with several other union supporters, Annette had a well-developed critique of the production quota system and the learning curves. She would have preferred a straight incentive system and bonus pay, but she also felt that the numbers were too high. "They are always comparing us to the other plant. . . . But their swagers have been there an average of fifteen to twenty years, and we've only been swaging a year or a year and a half."

She had been hired in September 1981, six months after Bonnie had started on Team A. Her feelings about the team meetings were similar to Bonnie's: "It would be just like one big 'tattle-tale session.' That's the way our other facilitator . . . the one before José. He had the meetings being conducted like that. It got to where everybody was fighting with each other and everything." Annette's complaints, like Bonnie's, were based both on her perception that difficulties with production were unfairly treated and her sense that the team concept was really not "participation."

At the time of our interview, Annette had just been warned that if her numbers did not improve she would be suspended for three days. She felt that this reprimand was related to her union support, "Because they are getting kind of nervous because the union wants to get in. So they are doing anything to get rid of the people that are for. . . . Like, I'm on the union committee . . . so . . . I'm not going to give a reason to get rid of me." Annette's suspicion was correct. As union activity increased, the company's antiunion strategies went into high gear.

MANAGEMENT'S ANTIUNION STRATEGIES

Management presented its high-involvement structure and philosophy as incompatible with a union. One company document stated, "We give everyone a chance to represent themselves without a 'third party' such as a union." Through formal and informal communications, management emphasized that a union would interfere with the effort to get everyone to participate, and the company would therefore "lose flexibility" in implementing the high-involvement design. In management's decision to come to Sunbelt City, the lack of a "strong union environment" had been a factor. Although other branch plants in both the East and the Southwest are unionized, the company would not have located the new plant in an area with a union environment. In addition, the larger corporation of which HealthTech is a part had located plants in Singapore and Taiwan in order both to avoid unions and to pay cheaper wages.

Most important, the company calculated that if it could keep the union out for three years it would save $5 million in wages, benefits, manpower, and administration. And when it reached its employee limit of five hundred, it would save over $10 million every three years.

Freeman and Medoff's framework for analyzing antiunion strategies, as described earlier, provides a useful starting point for our analysis. They focus on three types of strategies: positive employee relations, a tough legal campaign, and illegal tactics. However, the notion of "positive labor relations" needs to be expanded to include ways the company used the team structure to push a procompany and antiunion position. This was called by the plant psychologist the "proactive" approach—an approach in which the facilitator orchestrates and initiates the discussion of the union at team meetings and in that way gets across certain ideas about the union to employees.

In addition, however, this "proactive" or positive labor relations approach was supplemented with informal "negative" relations as well, activities that were not illegal and were not focused on disseminating antiunion information. Called the "individual conflict approach" by the plant psychologist, this was an approach in which management attempted to isolate individuals already known to be prounion at the team and individual levels. Prounion workers were to be isolated from other team members and confronted individually concerning their own attitudes.

In Freeman and Medoff's scheme, the tough legal campaign involves giving workers information not necessarily solicited by them but nevertheless important in informing them about the antiunion stance of the company. At HealthTech this included a barrage of leaflets, bulletins read in team meetings, team discussions to bring out antiunion views, an antiunion contest, and movies that stressed strikes, as well as conflict that was purportedly created by union activity.

There were two sets of illegal tactics that had a profound impact on the election's outcome, as we shall see. First, the firing of prounion employees created a climate of fear among workers. Second, the questioning of new applicants in order to screen out those with prounion attitudes virtually assured the procompany stance of the substantial number of workers hired during the final months of the union's campaign.

The team system became the organizational foundation for developing and implementing these three strategies. The informal relations between facilitator and team members and the more formal team meetings became the context in which management implemented both its proactive and its legal information-disseminating activities. The use of the team as part of management's antiunion strategies can best be illustrated by what happened to Drill Teams A, B, and C, where one supervisor, Dennis, used his team meetings to persuade workers to adopt the company point of view.

In Drill Team A, as we have already reported, Lucille was active in the forming of the procompany organization. She also played an important role as an antiunion spokesperson during team meetings. For example, Andres, one of the two prounion members of the team, reported that at a team meeting in September 1982, Lucille had asked, "How far would the union go to get into the plant?" In response, Dennis pulled out a piece of paper and said something like, "Oh, by the way, I've got something to read you about the union." Dennis read that a union in New York had gotten its members a twenty-five-cent raise. "Is this the kind of union you want representing you?" he asked. Andres retorted, "Why don't you stick to the facts of what the union has done at other HealthTech plants and what it can do here, and not some other union at another place?"

Elena, another antiunionist, responded, "If you're not happy with the company, why don't you resign?" She continued her attack, almost yelling at Andres. Dennis did not speak up. "He allowed the wolf pack to attack me," Andres

commented. Such acrimonious conflict meant that workers became reluctant to speak out, afraid of being ridiculed or even fired.

In Drill Team B, prounion support seemed stronger and was quietly developing among the group that worked consistently on the day shift (all women, including two Hispanic mothers we interviewed). At a team meeting on September 17, 1982, Dennis, the facilitator, took action to bring out any antiunion views which might be expressed publicly by team members. He mentioned a television show of the previous evening: "Speaking of TV, did anyone see the piece on Coors on '60 Minutes' last night?" A couple of workers responded that they had, as did a female personnel administrator who had been invited to come to the meeting. She was encouraged to give her views.

> It showed how the union keeps trying to get in at the Coors plant in Colorado, even when the workers don't want anything to do with it. It was real funny because they showed how they got all the employees in a great big room asking them what they thought of the company, and every single one of them said how much they liked working for the company, how much the company was trying to help them and all that stuff. . . . They showed all the stuff the company was doing for the workers—the gym they had set up, the benefits and all that. . . . And it was a really good show."

The administrator's speech was sufficient to bring out antiunion sentiments from three other workers.

After the union leaflet of October 25 and the union's letter to the company naming the organizing committee, the company moved more quickly to use the team meetings as a context for fighting prounion sentiment and to isolate prounion people. As the social psychologist said on October 27,

> But today . . . we have lifted the "hold" we have had on facilitators. Instead of having to depend on employees to bring things up about the union, to try to keep the union out, we are letting facilitators go. They can do what they want on the union issue.

Dennis, for example, stepped up his "proactive strategy," which was also combined with the "individual conflict approach" to isolate prounion workers. The first target was Rosa, a member of Drill Team C who was one of two prounion employees on the Compensation Committee, which dealt with the wage and evaluation system. During a team meeting, Dennis "tore the leaflet apart" and then asked for comments. As Rosa reported:

> Tracy spoke up. She said, "I don't feel Rosa should be on the Compensation Committee because I don't feel she is trustworthy enough now to express what we feel or want." She said my name had been on the union leaflet with other people she thought were not trustwor-

> thy enough because we were not for the HealthTech philosophy, compensation plan or team concept. . . . When she got through I said that I'd voluntarily step down from the committee. I didn't want to be on it if people felt that way about it. Plus, I suspected that I was being set up. Tracy had always been my friend. People said we were like sisters, that we even looked like sisters.

Dennis refused to let Rosa step down and said that the other teams should have a chance to decide this issue. The next day at a meeting of about seventy-five members of the whole Drill Department (Teams A–F), Dennis raised the issue of Rosa's resignation and asked for comments. Tracy again stood up and accused Rosa, "almost yelling." Several other antiunion employees hollered agreement and then Rosa was asked to stand up and be identified. Finally, Anne, a teammate, defended Rosa's performance on the committee, and Rosa was asked her opinion. "I feel I'm being harassed for my political opinion," she said, "and that is discrimination." Tracy later said, "You know they forced me to do that, don't you," and asked Rosa, "Do you forgive me?" Rosa replied that she would never forgive her.

Anne, in fact, felt that Dennis had subtly used the team as a way of "getting at" the union supporters.

> I think he tried to create conflict. There really were some hard-core [antiunion] people in our team. This is only a guess. But I think he got those people aside and said, "This is what I want you to do—bring up such and such an issue. When I'm talking about something, cut in." . . . These people *had* to be put up. I think that Tracy was put up to do what she did to Rosa. She was supposed to be her best friend. And for her to turn around and do that. Somebody had to put her up to that.

With these tactics, Dennis was able to keep union support in his three teams limited to two workers in Drill Team A (Lucille's team), a small group of three or four in Team B, and a small group in Team C (including Rosa, Anne, and three others). In contrast, the Channel A and B teams, during the fall of 1982, continued to give their new facilitator, José, a difficult time. Prounion women either brought up criticisms of the company directly or, if this tactic did not result in any change or dialogue, refused to participate. Team B was perhaps the most successful in this tactic. One team member, Dee, said, "He said that Team B was too loud or something. Every time we tried to say something, he would shut us up. Then if we weren't going to say something, he'd tell us, 'Why don't you talk?' So, he said, 'You guys just don't function as a team.' "

Annette, the single parent mentioned earlier, explained how the team had developed its own informal support network, "We've gotten closer and we look out for each other, like we are supposed to be doing . . . like what they are

saying. You know, disciplining each other and stuff like that. But [José's] getting upset, because he doesn't really know what's going on."

Thus Team B was very successful in becoming united around the issue of the union and in confronting their facilitator. Channel A and B had been the center of union sentiment from the beginning, and José, the new facilitator, had come from a union plant, so perhaps was not as committed as others to fighting the union in team meetings.

A measure of the union's support in early December 1982 was the fact that ninety-three workers (both women and men) signed a petition asking the company to investigate a bad smell that was pervading the production area of the plant. Workers were fearful that ETO, the dangerous chemical that was used to sterilize the sutures, might have seeped into the air filter system in the "clean room" in which the workers worked. The petition stated:

> We, the undersigned, want to know the names of the chemicals causing the bad smell in the plant. We are upset over the complaints of headaches, teary eyes, and nausea resulting from the odor, and we are very concerned about the effects of these chemicals on pregnant women and their unborn children. We have a right to know what chemicals we are being exposed to.

Phrased as a women's issue and backed by union supporters, this petition was signed by fifty-four Hispanic women and twenty-two Anglo and Black women.[12] Not all of the Hispanic and Anglo women who eventually voted for the union signed the petition. Thirty-seven Hispanic women and seven non-Hispanic women did sign it but later did not vote for the union. The company responded to the petition by arguing that ETO is not a compound with a smell and that, although they were looking into the cause of the odor, it was not hazardous to workers' health. A statement to this effect was read in all the team meetings. With this strong response on the part of the company, the issue eventually faded into the background. However, the petition represents a high point in terms of support for an issue that the union brought to the fore. By this time about 49 percent of the workers had signed union cards. The union decided to wait for card signing to increase beyond the 50 percent mark, a point that never came. Both the petition and the card signing may have represented more antimanagement feeling than actual willingness to support the union. In any case, from this period on, the company began to be more successful in eroding the growing union sentiment.

Despite the strong support on the ETO issue and the signing of union cards, most facilitators remained in control of their teams. The tactics that Dennis used with Drill Teams A, B, and C were beginning to have an effect and to keep workers who had been in the plant for a year or more from defecting to the union. Facilitators were using the rhetoric surrounding the "high-involvement" philosophy to isolate union supporters. Prounion workers had "bad attitudes," were not really "team members," or did not believe in the "Team concept" and thus were

not trustworthy. To be prounion was to be against the company and against the high-involvement philosophy. The attempt to redefine union supporters as being against the team concept and thus "losers" was another way of strengthening the informal basis of support for the company. More important, however, was the company's major illegal strategy: firing prounion workers.

The evidence presented by Freeman and Medoff suggests that illegal tactics such as firing prounion workers have the most devastating impact on union campaigns. Other tactics that would have a negative impact would be surveillance of union supporters during work hours and discrimination against prounion applicants for jobs. Firings in themselves might result in a negative reaction to the company, a galvanizing of sympathy for the union, and stronger support. We must ask, therefore, why firings would result in fear and compliance rather than resistance on the part of women workers. The effect of firings and other illegal tactics, we argue, is more damaging to a union drive when the company had already laid the basis for support for its antiunion position in the interpersonal relationships between workers and management. Channel Teams A and B may have been strongholds of union support, but the tactics of Dennis and other facilitators had laid the groundwork for antiunion sentiment in other teams, something that could be built on if strong union supporters could be fired. The team system at HealthTech and its use by management to support antiunion workers and isolate union supporters set the context in which firings would have a particularly negative impact on the union drive.

As early as November 5, 1982, the plant psychologist talked to Guillermo J. Grenier about the possibility of firing some of the prounion workers. He said that because the company was restricted legally in how much it could do to stop the union, it would have to act surreptitiously. He referred to one employee whom the company was getting ready to fire as a "fat slob" in the Drill Department. They were toying with ideas about firing her and hoped to put the union in a "no win" situation by doing it. In fact, the company succeeded in firing this woman because the doctor's excuse that she used to account for an absence did not cover the correct time period. A male union supporter was also fired but was later reinstated because of inconsistencies in the policies for making up absences that had been used to justify his termination.

Sometime in November management met with corporate lawyers who recommended using firing as an antiunion strategy. The first two firings had been "trial balloons" to see what the union would do when its supporters were fired for objective reasons. Additional firings were planned, probably to take place after Christmas, since the company "did not want to come across like Scrooge," firing people right before the holidays.

However, on December 16, two women on the Channel B team who were union supporters were fired for "falsifying company records." A worker named Maria had phoned to tell her friend Linda to log her in on the computer, that she would be five minutes late; however, she arrived at work at 8:00 rather than 7:05

A.M. At the end of the day, Maria's facilitator called her into the back room and confronted her with the situation.

> I went back there and I talked to him, and he said somebody had seen me clocked in. And I said I'd go look on my time sheet. "But Linda clocked you in early," he said. "Ya, I told her to clock me in, because I'm going to be five minutes late at the most." And he goes, "You're not supposed to do that." There wasn't no rules. Everybody clocks each other in. They knew about it too.

The next day Maria was dismissed, despite the fact that her time sheet (as opposed to the computer) recorded her 8:00 A.M. entry into the plant. Maria suspected that her firing was the result of her name being on the October 25 leaflet. And according to the social psychologist, the plant manager had decided to fire these women because it would be a good symbolic gesture, a good way to scare other prounion employees.

Thus by Christmastime four of the twenty-one employees who had signed the October 25 leaflet had been fired and another had been forced to resign from the Compensation Committee following a large meeting in which she had been publicly embarrassed and had been left visibly shaken.

WORKER RESISTANCE

Women workers who were prounion, and their male peers, did not knuckle under to the company's antiunion strategies. A number of "unfair labor practice" charges were filed with the NLRB on October 27 alleging that workers were being interrogated, threatened with loss of benefits if a union was formed, and threatened with firing. Additional charges were filed after the November 6 firings and after the firings of Maria and Linda on December 19.

Nevertheless, the union was working in a climate of fear. It was clear that supporting the union could mean being threatened with a suspension if one's numbers were down (as in Annette's case) or being fired through the strict application of company policy that had been more leniently applied to non–union supporters (as in the case of Maria and Linda). The first months of the union campaign (between July and October) had resulted in a concentration of supporters in the Channel A and B teams, with some support among some of the Drill teams and in Devices. Between October and December the company stepped up its tactics, adding illegal activities to the full range of other strategies, including the manipulation of attitudes in team meetings and the more straightforward dissemination of information through leaflets and the bulletin board. The union was thus faced with the need to persuade more workers to join the union in a threatening atmosphere. In addition, the company was continuing to expand its work force and was carefully screening new employees to make sure they would be antiunion when they entered the plant. The union committee continued to meet in

January and February, and at the end of February an open meeting was held at a local hotel.

In the meantime, a mechanic who had not previously been associated with the union drive was fired for talking back to his supervisor. This mechanic and a coworker had written to the plant manager in mid-February expressing support for the union. The firing enlisted a great deal of sympathy from workers. The union's filing of an "unfair labor practice" charge on the mechanic's behalf gained his support and that of several other workers in early March. In addition, the union had advertised in the local newspapers seeking information on applicants who had been interrogated about their union views during interviews or training. Clearly, the union was continuing to take an aggressive legal stand in trying to protect workers who had been discriminated against for their views or support of the union drive.

The union also conducted a trip for five production workers (two antiunion, two undecided, and one scared to take a side) to the company's unionized plant in the eastern United States. Although they were not able to see the inside of the plant, the workers met with one hundred union employees and made a videotape of the meeting that was later shown to the Sunbelt City workers at a union-sponsored meeting. All five workers who made the trip were persuaded to take the union's side.

As Rosa's friend Anne said,

> What really opened my eyes was going to [the East] and seeing what they had over there. It's not an individual team over there. It's one big team over there. It opened my eyes, and that was towards the end of the campaign. . . . We need somebody to represent us—to back us up—that's what we need. . . . You go up and talk to them. And after you have that talk, he still has the final say. You have nobody—no other recourse to talk to. You have no other alternative. Who's going to fight for you . . . against the company. And that's basically why I got involved with the union.

Lorraine, a single parent who worked in Devices, had worked at another HealthTech plant for five years and had been a union member. She was the only worker who had transferred from a union plant in another city to the new Sunbelt City plant. In order to do so she had had to drop out of the union, and she had found it necessary to mention her difficulty in resigning from the union in order to become hired. She was advised not to talk about the union, but by February 1983 she was becoming involved with the union campaign. She explained the reasons for the trip and its impact on the drive.

> 'Cause the company had bad-mouthed the union really bad, so bad that everybody was afraid of the union. So they sent five of us and we went to [another company plant]. And when we came back, we told them. And a lot of people turned for us and for the union. [But]

> there was a lot of people that wouldn't . . . that's where the tension developed.

In March, sensing that it was not gaining much additional support, the union filed with the NLRB for an election. Between that date and the date of the election, May 18, the company continued to pursue its tactics of isolating pro-union employees but also moved in several ways to step up its public antiunion campaign.

THE UNION DRIVE REACHES CONCLUSION

Since late fall of 1982 the plant psychologist had been making a concerted effort to identify union supporters and then to isolate them. In December, he reported to Guillermo Grenier that facilitators were watching prounion workers, and when they saw them talking to antiunion or neutral people, they would go up and interrupt the conversation. The point, he explained, was to control the influence and interactions of the prounion people.

During this period the company began to rate all the employees on their stance on the union. "Plus one" and "plus two" were the procompany employees and "minus one" and "minus two" were the prounion employees. Undecided employees or those the company could not figure out were listed as zeros. The company was continuing to increase the pressure on prounion employees and, in the words of the plant psychologist, was "withdrawing status from them using a strong psychological approach." The company was trying to separate the "winners," or antiunion people, from the "losers," the prounion people.

Women workers reacted in different ways to this strategy of isolating the union supporters. Anne said,

> Some people react different to scare tactics. Me—I stand up and fight. That's the way I am. If someone threatens me, I . . . especially if I am boxed in a corner . . . I come out and fight. Some people don't. They give into the threat. And I think that's what a majority of the people did do. They were afraid. Afraid of losing their jobs. Afraid of the . . . humiliation you were put through . . . and you were humiliated. All these things added up and they just didn't want to go through with it. So they went to the side they thought would win.

Others took rejection by management more personally. Lorraine, the single parent in Devices, was in a large department where the facilitator had come from another plant, bringing many employees with him. Their loyalty to him partially accounted for the low proportion of union supporters (eight out of twenty-six). Lorraine herself felt that she was particularly ostracized by management when they realized that she had become prounion.

> They ignored me. Before the campaign started, they were always inviting me to go here and there. Then afterwards . . . not even a "Hi." . . . They'd come onto the production floor and they'd stand like [in groups of] two or three and make faces and stand like they were talking about me. And that would bother me. Because they had never done it before.

As the election approached, the company engaged in a more open expression of antiunion sentiment. Some of the activities had all the earmarks of the "tough legal campaign." In April the company initiated a Union Strike Contest, asking employees to guess how many strikes the union had engaged in between 1975 and 1983. Memos from the plant manager were frequently circulated to employees and plantwide meetings were held. At one meeting in May a film on union violence was shown. The motto of the campaign became "Be a Winner! Vote No."

Lorraine felt strongly about how the company handled this part of the campaign and the image of the union that it presented.

> I wouldn't have portrayed the image that these people would. This is a free country. Everybody could do what they want. Sure there's rules . . . but they don't have to go around treating us like that. . . . You couldn't say certain things. You couldn't bring in certain papers. I would have let people bring in their papers; you know equal—both sides. But it wasn't equal. Only one side. And that wasn't right. That wasn't a fair way.

The union's one important strategy during this period was to hold a public meeting on April 12 organized by a group of lawyers and community leaders concerned over the course of the union campaign. As mentioned earlier, Guillermo Grenier read a statement at this meeting arguing that the teams were being used as part of the company's "union-busting" strategy. Shortly afterward the plant social psychologist and the personnel director were dismissed, and Grenier's statement was used by the union in pressing its NLRB charges.

Despite the public exposure of the company's strategies, on election day, May 18, 1982, the union lost, getting only 71 votes; 141 employees voted against the union, and 11 votes were contested.

WHY DID THE UNION LOSE?

In order to understand why the union, in the end, was not able to gain the support of the majority of the company's production workers, it is important to assess the company's heavy-handed strategies in relation to the composition of the labor force. Of the 220 employees in the bargaining unit, 65 percent were Hispanics and 35 percent non-Hispanics (including Anglos, Blacks, Native Americans, and Asians). Seventy-nine percent of the work force (174 out of 220) were female,

including 114 Hispanic women and 55 non-Hispanic women (68.4 percent and 31.6 percent of the female production work force). Of the 174 female workers, 46 percent of the women had children (N = 80), 27 percent had no children (N = 47), and we had no data on whether the remaining 27 percent had children or were childless (N = 47). In other words, this was a work force dominantly composed of working mothers, mostly of Hispanic descent.

In the end proportionately more non-Hispanic women (Anglos, Blacks, and Native Americans) and more men (Hispanic and Anglo) voted for the union than did Hispanic women. The proportion of Hispanic women who voted for the union was lower than that in the overall bargaining unit. Thus, while the female labor force was 68.4 percent Hispanic (119/174), only 28 Hispanic women or 23.5 percent voted for the union (28/119) (*see Table 10.1 and Table 10.2*).

If we look at the mothers (both married and single) in the bargaining unit, the picture is more striking. Of the 80 women whom we knew were mothers, only 30 (or 37.5 percent) voted for the union. And of the 60 Hispanic mothers, only 17 (or 28.3 percent) voted for the union (*see Table 10.3*).

If we take the ETO petition mentioned earlier as an indication of the support the union had gained by early December, before the firings became a successful management strategy, we can see that the union lost 37 Hispanic women (including 18 mothers) and 7 non-Hispanic women (including 5 mothers) who had been willing to sign the petition but did not vote for the union five months later. Clearly the union had been able to raise an important woman's issue and galvanize women's support. However, the company in response was able to diffuse the issue during a period in which it fired 2 Hispanic women. The message conveyed during the period between December and February was that support for the union could mean losing a job. Hispanic women, including a significant number of mothers, dropped from the potentially prounion ranks. Had these 37 Hispanic and 7 Anglo, Black, and Asian women voted for the union, the union would have garnered 115 votes, enough to win the election.

Table 10.1
VOTING PATTERNS AMONG FEMALE WORKERS

	Hispanic		*Non-Hispanic*		*Total*	
Vote	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Prounion	28	23.5%	22	40%	50	28.7%
Antiunion	91	76.5%	33	60%	124	71.3%
Total	119	100.0%	55	100%	174	100.0%

Note: These figures are estimates. We had a list of 221 eligible to vote and were able to identify 65 of 71 probable voters from petitions signed by workers who favored union policies and from the information given us by the union organizer.

Table 10.2
VOTING PATTERNS AMONG MALE WORKERS

	Hispanic		*Non-Hispanic*		*Total*	
Vote	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Prounion	12	52.2%	10	45.5%	22	48.8%
Antiunion	11	47.8%	12	54.5%	23	51.2%
Total	23	100.0%	22	100.0%	45	100.0%

Note: These figures are estimates. We had a list of 221 eligible to vote and were able to identify 65 of 71 probable voters from petitions signed by workers who favored union policies and from the information given us by the union organizer.

Table 10.3
VOTING PATTERNS AMONG MOTHERS (N = 80)

	Hispanic		*Non-Hispanic*		*Total*	
Vote	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Prounion	17	28.3%	13	65%	30	37.5%
Antiunion	43	71.7%	7	35%	50	62.5%
Total	60	100.0%	20	100%	80	100.0%

Note: These figures include both single parents and married mothers, so we cannot assume that these mothers were the sole support of their children, but on the basis of the NSF interviews we can assume that their incomes were vital in supporting their families.

The union was able to attract the support of some Hispanic women, but others were either interested only initially or failed to support the union at all. Although the NSF interviews were not designed to explicate the issue of union support, they do offer some clues to these varying reactions. For some, workplace difficulties provided a context for galvanizing support especially within teams formed early in HeathTech's history. For example, we interviewed Valerie and Delores in Drill Team B. On this team, antiunion sentiment was strongest among the six members who worked on the evening shift. Unlike in other teams whose members rotated on a one- or two-week basis, enough Drill Team B members were willing to work evenings that the six who preferred to work days could do so without rotating. Both Valerie and Delores felt that shift rotation was the biggest disadvantage of the job, and both became union supporters because they felt the union would be able to abolish the rotation system. As Valerie said:

> When we do have to go nights, it's a real big problem. One of the biggest problems I have there. . . . It's hard, because baby-sitter

> wise, no baby sitter's going to want . . . okay, these two weeks you can take her and then for two hours the next two weeks. I've got to find somebody that can take her at nights. And that's hard on my husband, it's hard on my little girl.

Delores was equally adamant that the rotating shift system interfered with her time with her family and kept her away from her five-year old daughter. Though neither reported difficulties with their job, Valerie rated "pay," "supervisors," and "opportunities for promotion" low (3 on a scale of 4), and Delores felt that the plant was not a safe place to work at night because of the dark, unprotected parking lot. In addition she felt that her job conflicted with her family responsibilities when she had to work nights, and she felt a great deal of pressure in meeting her "numbers." Valerie also felt that the team meetings were "not working," that workers were not getting anything out of them. Despite these relatively negative comments about the job, the crucial issue for both women in supporting the union was shift rotation and its impact on them as mothers. For both these women, the union was able to capitalize on their frustrations and keep their allegiance, despite the climate of fear induced by the firings and other unfair labor practices.

Other Hispanic workers were part of teams more under the control of supervisors, worked in operations not so difficult as Channel or Drill Swaging, or may have been screened for antiunion sentiments when they were hired. Perhaps typical of the kinds of women workers the union did not win over were Regina, Grace, Karen, and Jenny—the four nonunion supporters, in addition to Lucille, who were interviewed for the NSF project. Regina and Grace were Hispanic single parents, while Karen was an Anglo married to an Hispanic and Jenny was part Native American married to an Anglo. Economically they were in situations similar to those of the union supporters we interviewed. Regina and Grace were single parents like Annette and Lorraine. Jenny's husband had periods of unemployment not dissimilar to Bonnie's and Valerie's spouses. Karen herself had had a series of service-sector jobs, and although her husband had a stable position at a mental health center, his pay was low.

However, all had been at HealthTech for a shorter amount of time than the union supporters (with the exception of Lorraine, who had been a union member elsewhere). And all were in departments where there was a low level of union support (Foil/Overwrap, Drill D, and Devices). Several of these women had complaints about their jobs. Grace did not like working on rotating shifts, and Regina also mentioned that working on two shifts was a major disadvantage of the job. Karen was nervous about her evaluations and did not like the way the teams were being used. Despite these disadvantages, each rated her job more highly than union supporters rated theirs. The negative aspects of the job were outweighed by financial need and job security. These were the kinds of women whom the union needed to win over in order to win the election. But it was difficult to do so in the face of the atmosphere successfully created by the company, partially since these women were in team contexts where there were few

prounion voices. In the end, we cannot say for sure why these four women did not vote for the union, but we can assess the impact of the firm's strategies on the female work force as a whole.

In Freeman and Medoff's framework, the firings and the delay of the election would account for the union's loss. But in the HealthTech context workers were also part of a team structure in which facilitators were hard at work using a number of tactics to keep workers from turning prounion. The December firings had created a climate of fear. Although there was a show of support when the mechanic was fired in February, only thirty-seven workers signed the petition, all of them strong union supporters. The fact that the NLRB put off hearings on the firings and other unfair labor practices so that none of these workers was reinstated by the time of the election allowed the company to keep the upper hand. Certainly screening of new applicants had an important impact. The union drew only a smattering of support from teams formed late in the campaign—that is, from Drill Teams D, E, F, and G (2 votes) and from Channel C and D (3 votes). The antiunion votes in these 6 teams amounted to 52, more than one-third of the antiunion support.

Given the economic vulnerability of Hispanic women, particularly mothers, we can see how the team structure and management tactics created a climate in which it was risky for those not already committed to the union to vote for it.

SEEKING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The union did not attempt to counter the company's strategies by seeking support from church and community institutions early in the campaign. The head organizer believed that shop floor issues were the major ones in the drive and that the media might be more sympathetic to the company's position were the campaign taken outside the workplace. However, a few weeks before the election, the union, perhaps because it knew it needed more votes, attempted to mobilize community support through a public meeting and letters from religious and political figures. For example, the Archbishop's office issues a letter that said:

> An important union election is taking place at HealthTech this week. By getting a Union at this plant, wage earners would gain increased bargaining power, would improve their wages and job rights and would be better able to provide for their families. Support for those who are seeking union representation would advance the cause of workers' rights and human dignity here at home and would be consistent with the Church's teachings about the dignity of labor.

In addition, the former lieutenant governor sent letters to workers and held poorly attended meetings hoping to educate workers on the benefits of unions. His last letter was sent to all employees and said in part:

> I strongly believe that a Union at HealthTech would have a positive impact which would benefit not only HealthTech members but also

> the entire community. First, union membership would mean higher wages. Higher wages would mean more money into the economy. In addition, a union would help the state establish itself as a state interested in the kind of industry which provides fair wages and good working conditions.

The letter came at a time when workers were being bombarded with material from the company, including handouts about the impact of a strike on wages, a handout charging that the union had a history of filing unfair labor practices, and a paycheck insert stating what union dues would mean in terms of lost pay.

Support from the church and community leaders came too late to change anyone's mind. In an atmosphere in which NLRB charges were not being heard, fired workers had not been reinstated, and the risks of a union were being clearly pushed by the company, workers who had not been won over to the union side undoubtedly saw union support as too risky. These workers included many Hispanic women, mothers as well as single individuals.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a long-standing literature on human relations and small-group behavior in industrial settings, beginning with the famous Hawthorne experiments at Western Electric in the 1930s. Various forms of the human relations perspective, which include a personnel department to fit workers to jobs and various forms of psychological testing and counseling, are part of the structure of most firms. More recently, social scientists have focused on various forms of control exercised by management over workers.[13] The issue of workplace participation has received recent attention, but little has been done to analyze how new participative-management structures can reorganize the labor process as well as the social relations of the work force to create new forms of management control.

In the HealthTech case, rather than relying on an hierarchical authority structure with large departments under a supervisor who reported to area supervisors and a plant manager, management structured production around small teams of twelve to fourteen members under the guidance of a "facilitator" who was to "facilitate" the human relations within the group, urging workers to help each other increase output as well as to participate in the hiring, evaluation, and firing of their peers.

The team structure was an attractive control mechanism because of its apparent humanizing effect on a bureaucratized and hierarchical work environment. The team structure helped to "debureaucratize" work; and rules and regulations were less formal and appeared to be the responsibility of workers. Peer pressure was institutionalized as the major control mechanism. Workers felt they had more responsibility for the performance of others. Yet the facilitator remained in charge, wielding power in an informal but real way. Managing the discussion of union issues and isolating those with prounion views were just two examples of the ways in which facilitators attempted to control worker attitudes.

Furthermore, the team structure fragmented the labor force. This had both positive and negative aspects. As the union drive developed, the close interaction among team members in addition to difficulties workers faced in meeting production quotas helped to build prounion sentiment in some teams. As one manager said, the team under some circumstances can be just like a juvenile gang. On the other hand, since teams were relatively isolated from each other, the team structure could hinder the spread of prounion sentiment. In some teams, facilitators were able to neutralize prounion activists and keep them from converting other workers. The few activists became isolated and silenced in teams dominated by procompany workers. The company continued to hire new workers, carefully screening them for any union support. As one facilitator said, "We hire antiunion people by screening for them, and it's my job to see to it that they stay that way."

Thus it is important to emphasize the process of the campaign as it interacted with workers' experience of the labor process, the team structure, and the economic vulnerability of a female, predominantly Hispanic work force. In the early months of the campaign, the company probably made some mistakes. Facilitators were new at their jobs, some had had experience in traditional plants or lacked strong antiunion views. Difficulties with the production process plus some obvious evidence that workers were not so powerful as they had been led to believe allowed a number of the first workers hired to "see through" the team philosophy. As the drive progressed to a second stage, management turned to more traditional tactics to keep the union out: (1) legal tactics, particularly bulletins and discussions to persuade workers that their company did not need a union, and (2) illegal actions, including the screening of new workers for prounion views and the firing of union activists. These were implemented within the team structure that had the potentiality of isolating the prounion teams from teams more directly under the control of supervisors and filled with new, carefully screened recruits.

With the beginning of this second stage (starting with the pre-Christmas firings), it became apparent that supporting the union would mean, at the least, being branded as having a bad attitude or being against the "team concept" and, at the most, losing one's job. The plant psychologist and facilitators attempted to control the interactions of prounion activists by interrupting their conversations with other workers. They rated workers on a scale of "procompany" to "anticompany" to keep track of their own support. The careful screening of new employees and the use of team meetings by facilitators made it possible to win over many employees to the company's view. Here, taking key words and phrases from the notions surrounding "team support" and the "team concept" and using them to judge prounion workers as "anticompany" and as "losers" was probably effective. However, the economic threat of job loss was more critical to showing neutral employees what was at stake.

During the last two months, under a barrage of leaflets, meetings, and movies (the more traditional techniques of the tough union campaign), the dan-

gers of losing one's job became more salient. From the company's point of view, spending $1 million on the campaign was well worth it. For most women in the plant, this job was the best job they had ever had. They could put up with team meetings, keep their "numbers" up, and deal with the more strictly enforced absentee policy if it meant remaining in what was basically a high-paying job in a clean, new plant with good benefits and job security.

The defeat of the union cannot be blamed on the passivity of women workers, traditional Hispanic values, or the lack of women's commitment to their jobs. Instead, many women (including Hispanic women) forged strategies of resistance in attempting to fight for union representation. That an initially promising campaign turned to defeat is the result of a number of factors: the team structure in combination with the heavy-handed legal and illegal tactics of management in the context of an economically vulnerable work force. That the union did not succeed is a measure both of the company's power and of the importance that women placed on retaining their jobs in an atmosphere of considerable conflict and threat.

NOTES

1. C. Duron, "Mexican Women and Labor Conflict in Los Angeles: The ILGWU Dressmakers' Strike of 1933," *Aztlan* 15, No. 1 (1984): 145–161; Vicki L. Ruiz, "*Obreras y Madres:* Labor Activism among Mexican Women and Its Impact on the Family," in Ignacio García and Raquel Rubio Goldsmith, eds., *La Mexicana/Chicana,* Renato Rosaldo Lecture Series Monograph, Vol. 1 (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1985); Vicki L. Ruiz, "Working for Wages: Mexican Women in the Southwest, 1930–80," Working Paper No. 19 (Tucson: Southwest Institute for Research on Women, University of Arizona, 1986); L. Coyle, G. Hershatter, E. Honig, "Women at Farah: An Unfinished Story," in Magdalena Mora and Adelaida R. Del Castillo, eds., *Mexican Women in the United States: Struggles Past and Present,* Occasional Paper No. 2 (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center Publications, University of California, 1980), 117–143.

2. P. Zavella, "The Impact of 'Sun Belt Industrialization' on Chicanas," *Frontiers* 8, No. 1 (1984): 21–28, esp. 21 and 22.

3. R. B. Freeman and J. L. Medoff, *What Do Unions Do?* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 227.

4. We have used a pseudonym for both the city and the plant; we have also changed the names of individuals whom we interviewed in order to protect their privacy.

5. In the 1950s and 1960s the labor force participation rate of Hispanic women was lower than that of Anglo women, but by 1970 the rate was 40 percent, only 3 percentage points behind the Anglo rate. In 1980, 42.6 percent of married Hispanic women with children under the age of six were employed, and 54.7 percent of those with children between six and eighteen held jobs.

6. Freeman and Medoff, *What Do Unions Do?,* 231.

7. Ibid., 233–236.

8. Ibid., 238.

9. The project was titled "Women's Work and Family Strategies in the Context of 'Sunbelt' Industrialization," NSF Grant No. BNS 8112726. In addition to Louise

Lamphere's interviews, Patricia Zavella, Jennifer Martinez, and Peter Evans conducted some of the interviews used in this article.

10. Elton Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); F. J. Roethlisberger and W. Dickson, *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939).

11. Drill and channel swaging are two different methods of attaching a surgical needle to a gut or silk cord. The channel technique took eighteen months to master; the drill technique took twelve.

12. Nine men, including five Hispanic men, also signed the petition. Four of the ninety-three signatures were illegible.

13. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); Richard Edwards, *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).