

# As We All Gather at Stanford

By Todd Davies

**M**y parents were both born into poor, immigrant working families during the 1930s. But they both managed to go to college, and together they rose up the income ladder during the postwar years. Some of their good fortune could certainly be traced to the strong labor unions that forced the New Deal and that made sure that workers could support their families when my parents were growing up. That union strength has been eroded in the years since WWII, thanks to attacks on workers' rights like the Taft-Hartley Act. But I don't think most people in this country are aware what a big price we have paid for that loss of union strength.

At the same time, a big part of my parents' good luck in the post-war years was dependent on their white skin. It took me a long time and a lot of study to realize that simple fact and its implications for me. I got a good education and had more opportunities than most, in large part because of what unions did for white folks in the first half of the 20th century. Now, in this globalizing era when most poor immigrant workers are people of color, many of us who rose out of that earlier era have conveniently forgotten, or were never taught, what brought us here.

Of course, the convenient loss of collective memory and understanding is not accidental. There has been a relentless and shockingly successful campaign of propaganda, oppression, and hoarding of resources by the ruling class in this country for the last several decades. A big part of that campaign has

been about getting complete control of mass media. And another big part has been about pitting working people against each other, especially by race and immigration status.

We meet here at LaborTech once again (this is my third LaborTech conference) to talk about the strategy and tactics that will win against corporate media, against racism and xenophobia, against warmongering, and against the ways in which all of these things distract us from the real struggle for justice.

The Stanford campus represents some of the best and worst of that struggle – a place where privileged elites wield great power and promote venture capitalism as a solution to almost everything, a place built on the blood of many generations, going back to the Ohlone who lived here for centuries, and the Chinese workers who built Leland Stanford's railroads. But also a place where workers, some students and alumni, and a few faculty and non-union staff have come together in recent years to win victories for janitors, hospital workers, food service workers, and others who work here, thanks partly to Internet-based organizing of the progressive voices in our community; and a place where some meticulous scholars are showing, for those who couldn't see it with their own eyes, that neoliberalism is a disaster and that greed doesn't make everyone better off, after all. Who knew?

We are also meeting in the Silicon Valley, the region hardest-hit by the recent wave of offshoring. This valley has been a notoriously hostile place for labor organizing, but we are seeing a change in consciousness now, and I hope this conference can do something to help further that.

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## Welcome to Stanford, LaborTechers.

## We are rarely graced by such admirable guests

### LaborTech/Access 2004 Planning Committee Members

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