Three top organizers to discuss activism in the 21st century

By Jennifer McNulty

Union organizer Amy Dean, head of San Jose's Central Labor Council, has emerged as a labor leader for the new millennium, taking on labor issues at the core of today's "new economy," such as the rise in temporary employment, access to health insurance, and pension portability.

Dean will be joined by two other prominent social activists for a free public discussion about community organizing in the 21st century on Thursday, February 22, at 7 p.m. in the Kresge Town Hall on the UC Santa Cruz campus.

Sponsored by UCSC's new Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community (CJTC), the gathering will be organized as a conversation about the inequity and injustice that underlie California's "new economy," said CJTC Director Manuel Pastor, a professor of Latin American and Latino studies at UCSC.

"As California enters the new millennium, it has become the center of the new economy, the new diversity, and the new inequality," said Pastor. "Having once been a beacon of opportunity, California is now home to widening divides in income dispersion, educational opportunity, access to health care, and other measures of well-being."

Drawing on the values of the 1960s, labor unions today have adapted to the new conditions of globalization, demographic
change, and dispersed corporate power by targeting new immigrant workers and lobbying for public policies to help the working poor, said Pastor.

Dean, who has led the fight for workers' rights in the new economy of Silicon Valley, will be joined by Carlos Porras, executive director of Communities for a Better Environment, and Anthony Thigpenn, the founder of AGENDA, a grassroots organization based largely in South Los Angeles that focuses on economic justice.

Dean is the executive officer of the South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council and executive director of Working Partnerships USA, an independent think tank that works on labor policy issues. As head of the 15th-largest labor council in the country representing more than 100,000 workers, Dean is the first woman to lead a Central Labor Council of this size.

Porras has more than 30 years of experience as a labor, community, and environmental leader. He has led an explosion of community-based activity around environmental inequities in the largely immigrant neighborhoods of industrial Los Angeles.

Thigpenn, too, is a lifelong activist. A former Black Panther, he negotiated with Steven Spielberg's DreamWorks SKG entertainment company to create training programs for inner-city youth to join the animation industry.

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