

From the Social Equity Caucus Working Group

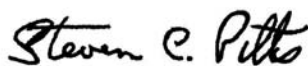
Environmental justice activists have taken heroic steps fighting environmental degradation, which falls disproportionately on people of color and is magnified by the poverty suffered by most communities of color. Clearly, the environmental and economic problems faced by our communities are intertwined, and environmental justice cannot be attained as long as poverty remains unchallenged. The twin ills of racial oppression and class exploitation indicate that the movement for environmental justice must expand its work to include the battle for quality jobs.

Environmental justice activists have long battled economic development plans that place hazards in communities of color. Now, increasingly, activists are seeking to be proactive by proposing “green” solutions to the problems of economic development and job creation. However, more must be done.

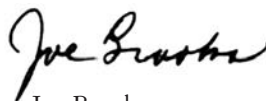
Because of institutional racism and the development model of the twenty-first century global economy, millions of people of color have jobs that fail to provide family-sustaining wages. “Green” industries are healthy correctives to this economic trajectory but they cannot address the need for quality jobs on a scale that is needed. Added attention to job training and access to existing good jobs is also vital, but this does not solve the problems facing most low-income workers. Disproportionately, people of color clean and guard office buildings, care for young children, the elderly, and the disabled, and work in retail and hospitality establishments. These jobs are being created by the millions each year and no attempt to move people into better jobs or generate alternate employment will change this dynamic. There must be a movement to transform the quality of these jobs. To ignore this reality does a disservice to communities of color.

How do we transform jobs? Two primary strategies can transform jobs: 1) workers can organize and use their bargaining power to improve job quality, and 2) laws can be passed which enact labor standards that force businesses to create better situations for their employees. Unions have long been the primary organizing vehicle. Many jobs, which we now take for granted as being good jobs, became that way through years of struggle by union members. Recently, worker centers have sprung up in many cities to improve the lives of workers through a combination of organizing, service delivery, and policy advocacy. In addition, coalitions of labor and community organizations have begun a movement to develop new laws that raise minimum wages, force city contractors to pay living wages, and require certain industries to pay higher wages.

Urban Habitat has long advocated for regional, multi-issue solutions to the challenges facing our communities. Joining and building labor-community coalitions is emerging as a positive path to fulfilling this vision. The emerging Quality Jobs Working Group of the Social Equity Caucus is one step on this path. Success in these arenas of struggle will especially benefit communities bearing the burdens of environmental racism. In addition, the alliances between the movement for environmental justice and the movement for quality jobs will generate more political power, which we can wield in fights to end environmental degradation. We invite our readers to study some of the successful projects detailed in the following pages and to join us in these efforts.



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& the **Race, Poverty Environment**

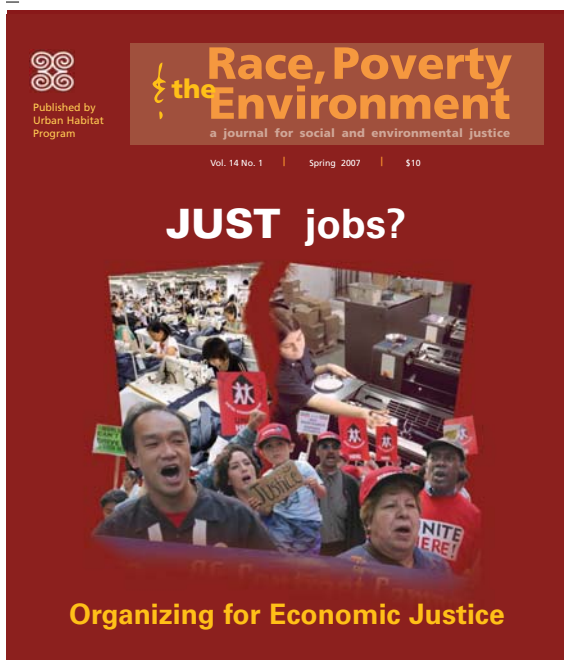
a journal for social and environmental justice



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