

Green Jobs Corps in Oakland

By Ian Kim

In the aftermath of the 2001 California energy crisis, several energy companies were sued for overcharging and contributing to the fake shortages. The companies eventually settled, and \$4.5 million of that settlement is earmarked for the city of Oakland, to be spent over the next three years on renewable energy and energy efficiency projects. Thanks to the Oakland Apollo Alliance and the Oakland Mayor's Office of Sustainability—and pending formal approval in early 2007—\$100,000 will be used to create the Oakland Green Jobs Corps.

The program will create paid internships in renewable energy and energy efficiency industries, and will provide a comprehensive job-training pathway—soft skills training and basic literacy, followed by vocational hard skills and on-the-job training. More importantly, the Green Jobs Corps program will primarily benefit Oakland residents with barriers to employment: young adults lacking work experience, kids snared in the juvenile justice system, and immigrants with cultural and linguistic barriers.

In the long run, we need a larger set of overlapping pathways involving major educational institutions. The public school district, community colleges, union apprenticeship programs, workforce training institutions, community-based programs, and the continuing/adult education system must all embrace green job training. And all of these institutions must connect with the industries and businesses that actually employ people. This creates more than a pipeline—it creates a real “green collar” infrastructure.

Consider the Peralta Community College District, which includes Laney College, Merritt College, the College of Alameda, and Berkeley City College, and serves over 25,000 students, 70 percent of whom are people of color. The vast majority of these students seek vocational training and job opportunities, not transfers to four-year colleges. In spring 2006, the District launched the “Sustainable Peralta Initiative,” which will have a chance to prove itself in 2007. Peralta is set to renovate all of

its buildings with a recently approved \$390 million bond measure. Hopefully, the colleges can train their students, and then actually employ them, renovating Peralta's own buildings, using green, energy-efficient technology.

A 2006 study by the Los Angeles Economic Roundtable (www.economicrt.org) revealed 17 promising green technology industries in Los Angeles that are stable or growing, already have over 500 jobs, and pay monthly wages of \$2,500 or more. In Los Angeles, thousands are already employed in green jobs, and these numbers will grow.

Oakland needs similar studies. Which “green” industries are likely to grow, and by how much? Los Angeles points the way, but every urban community faces unique challenges, which we believe can be met with opportunities in the growing green economy. By 2020, Oakland should employ an impressive array of sustainable practices: we will be “oil independent” and “zero waste,” with a localized food economy and plenty of renewable energy. While we may not hit the mark in all these areas, few other cities are even trying. Across America, communities have lost their manufacturing base, and are looking for answers. We know those answers need to be sustainable. It's our belief that Oakland's long history as a blue-collar town leaves it well positioned to thrive as a green-collar mecca, but only if the city shows real leadership—and if advocates insist on a place at the table for low-income people and people of color in the new green economy. ■

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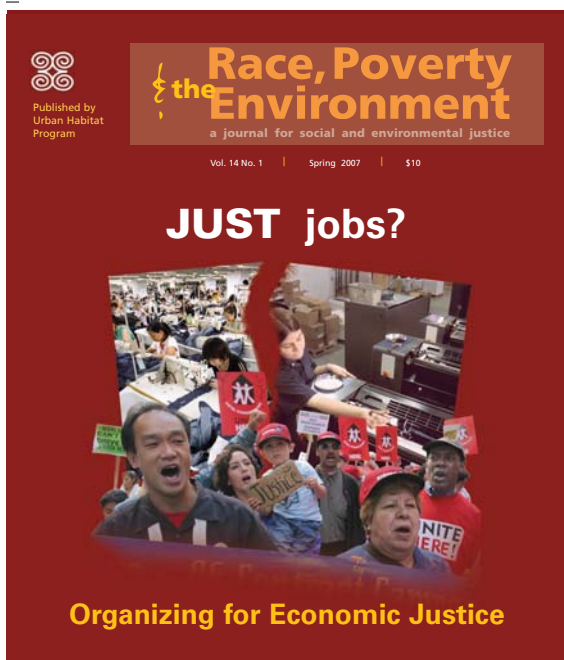
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