Jerry Butkiewicz is out to put the union label on San Diego. "I see the potential in this town to be wall-to-wall union," he says. "When 80 percent of the wealth is controlled by 14 percent of the population and the gap between the haves and the have-nots is getting bigger, not smaller how are you, as a single employee, going to go to your boss and say 'Hey, do you think I could get a raise?' Give me a break. There's no question the union is the way to go."

With 86 percent of San Diego County's workforce nonunionized, the secretary treasurer of the Labor Council of San Diego and Imperial Counties has his work cut out for him. Trade union activists say Butkiewicz is just the person to meet the challenge.

The energy level that he has - he can go in and talk to an organization and inspire them ..." says Jef Eatchel, secretary treasurer of Local 30 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union. "I call Jerry Butkiewicz the no bullshit, get something done kind of guy."

After a year in office, Butkiewicz has brought a combination of
heart, practicality and hard working enthusiasm to the Labor Council that many say had lost sight of its mission under Joe Francis' 14 year leadership. One of several labor activists pushing for changes at the council, the 43 year old former postal worker became the candidate of change and took over with a program to unify local trade unions and invigorate the staid labor organization.

This local philosophy rejecting complacency and focusing on renewing trade union unity, organizing campaigns and political action parallels the national shift that took place in the AFL-CIO with the election of John Sweeney to head the national organization.

Designed to unify, assist and coordinate political activities of the 100 or so AFL-CIO trade union locals in the two counties, the Labor Council has a small staff funded through affiliate dues. In his first 12 months, Butkiewicz brought in nearly two dozen AFL-CIO union locals as new or returning Labor Council members and energized a fledgling political organizing network that last November helped elect several labor-friendly candidates.

In addition, as the public face of the trade union movement in San Diego, Butkiewicz has extended labor's reach through alliances with business, government and community groups as part of his broad program to improve the lot of the worker.

Butkiewicz and other labor leaders, for example, quietly met with Sharp Healthcare President Michael Murphy to discuss how the quality of health care could be affected by the proposed purchase by Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corp. and the new labor union voted in by hospital nurses.

In January, Butkiewicz agreed to join the 24 member Greater San Diego Chamber of Commerce Jerry Butkiewicz is out to put the union label on San Diego, "I see the potential in this town to be wall to wall union," he says. "When 80 percent of the wealth is controlled by 14 percent of the population and the gap between the haves and the have-nots is getting bigger, not smaller - how are you, as a single employee, going to go to your boss and say, 'Hey, do you think I could get a raise?' Give me a break. There's no question the union is the way to go."

The energy level that he has - he can go in and talk to an organization and inspire them - says Jeff Eatchel, secretary-treasurer of Local 30 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union. "I call Jerry Butkiewicz the no-bullshit, getsomething-done kind of guy."

After a year in office, Butkiewicz has brought a combination of heart, practicality and hard-working enthusiasm to the Labor Council that many say had lost sight of its mission under Joe Francis' 14-year
leadership. One of several labor activists pushing for changes at the council, the 43-year-old former postal worker became the candidate of change and took over with a program to unify local trade unions and invigorate the staid labor organization.

This local philosophy rejecting complacency and focusing on renewing trade union unity, organizing campaigns and political action parallels the national shift that took place in the AFL-CIO with the election of John Sweeney to head the national organization.

Designed to unify, assist and coordinate political activities of the 100 or so AFL-CIO trade union locals in the two counties, the Labor Council has a small staff funded through affiliate dues. In its first 12 months, Butkiewicz brought in nearly two dozen AFL-CIO union locals as new or returning Labor Council members and energized a fledgling political organizing network that last November helped elect several labor-friendly candidates.

In addition, as the public face of the trade union movement in San Diego, Butkiewicz has extended labor's reach through alliances with business, government and community groups as part of his broad program to improve the lot of the worker.

Butkiewicz and other labor leaders, for example, quietly met with Sharp Healthcare President Michael Murphy to discuss how the quality of health care could be affected by the proposed purchase by Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corp and the new labor union voted in by hospital nurses.

In January, Butkiewicz agreed to join the 24-member Greater San Diego Chamber of Commerce executive committee, commencing "a new experiment" for organized labor. The goal? Open communication and build partnerships between labor and business, he says.

"We aren't a bunch of cigar-smoking, Cadillac-driving people who come in and demand things," he adds. "What we want to do is walk in very professionally and say, 'We're in a partnership. When you make money, we want to make money too'."

Labor solidified its credibility in the business community's eyes during the recent battle over the expansion of the stadium. Unions donated funds for pro-expansion newspaper advertisements and sent thousands of members to a key stadium support rally. "He's been able to deliver very well," says Gilbert Partida, chamber president and CEO.

Since January, Butkiewicz and Partida have worked together to defuse several potentially explosive labor-company disputes. Neither would provide specific examples, both said their efforts have been
effective

Partida says the invitation to labor - initiated by Chairman Steven Cushman - is part of a broad chamber diversification program begun in the early 1990s to expand the Republican dominated business organization to include other political viewpoints, a broader range of ethnicities, women, and now, labor.

"He brings another perspective that has been lacking," Partida says. "It's not only been a wise strategic move, but it works very well to have labor's participation. We will agree on 90 percent of the issues."

The differences usually aren't that big," agrees Butkiewicz. "It's the us and them mentality that makes it feel like it's a huge difference. That's what we're trying to change here. I'm working real hard to change it on the labor side."

Nonetheless, while labor and business can unify around issues of economic growth and job creation, they often disagree on just who will hold those jobs and, of course, whether new jobs should be unionized. The convention center expansion is a case in point. The Labor Council supports the expansion but differs with the chamber and City Hall over the question of who should be employed in construction. Labor is firmly committed to a local hiring requirement - through local union halls. For the most part, any union employment requirements raise the hackles of business owners and leaders in San Diego. Butkiewicz disagrees, but accepts the difference. "Where we're going to go our separate ways is after we create the jobs," he says. "We're going to organize them. The chamber and 95 percent of its members don't want us to organize, but that's OK. They're going to do what they've gotta do. We're going to do what we've gotta do, but we're going to work together to create them (jobs) so we have a better community to live and work in."

This basic difference in perspective underlies the cordial Chamber labor partnership - and Butkiewicz says it's up to business whether labor kisses or bites. "We can probably be one of the best partners of business in this town, and business is going to decide if we're going to be their partners or their worst enemy."

Sitting in his midcity office discussing why unions are good for their workers, Butkiewicz is in his element. Serious and direct, he returns again and again to the ethics of a living wage and the value of collective bargaining. Grandson of Polish immigrants and son of a union painter, it didn't take Butkiewicz long to join the union way of life. As a young postal worker right out of high school, he joined the American Postal Workers Union. quickly became shop steward and within a few years rose to president of the local. He's been a union man - in Phoenix, Oceanside and now San Diego - ever since.
Butkiewicz's personal credo aside, labor's clout boils down to a numbers game. And organizing is the number-one priority of the Labor Council this year.

The Labor Council soon will kick off a pro-union advertising campaign complete with toll-free number (1-888-B Union 2) in an effort to boost trade union membership numbers above the current 100,000. Right now, Butkiewicz estimates that one union election is being held each week somewhere in the two countries with unions picking up wins about 60 percent of the time.

Labor also is more united on the picket line these days. The new Labor Council "Street Heat" corps of volunteers is ready to hit the sidewalks on short notice. And Butkiewicz is particularly effective at inspiring the troops, numerous labor colleagues say. At the Hotel del Coronado last fall, he helped marshal a force of 200 to stage a sit-in to protest stalled contract negotiations, a mobilization that would not have been possible a year ago, says Eatchel.

Such union solidarity is critical for success, Butkiewicz notes. "What's going to happen in this county is this: If an employer takes on a union, he'll be taking on 100,000 union members in San Diego County. The Labor Council will encourage dialogue but make no bones about it: we're united now in San Diego County."

That unity also was evident last November in the council's effective Labor to Neighbor political organizing campaign. Full-time organizer Donald Cohen directed the campaign, which canvassed union members about their concerns and then queried candidates about their positions on those issues. Eight candidates were endorsed, and labor activists campaigned actively in trade union circles.

Assemblyman Howard Wayne (D-San Diego) was one of the seven candidates who won with labor's help. Wayne said he had no direct way of measuring the impact that Labor to Neighbor's endorsement and canvassing had on his victory, but praised the effort. "They were well organized," says Wayne. "They had a definite message, a definite targeted message. They had a lot of people out, and they were working hard. I think they made a big contribution."

As Eatchel sees it, Butkiewicz played a key role in getting the job done. "He gathered all the unions together and said, 'Hey guys, look, here's what we can do. We can get together, get our members out to knock on doors, make telephone calls, donate some money, get them out to vote, get our people in office, or we can sit back and get our ass kicked again. What do you want to do?'"

Up until May 1996, Butkiewicz ran campaigns of a different sort. Fourteen years ago, he was hired as the full time labor liaison to the
United Way. He organized philanthropic fund raising campaigns in companies with trade unions, a job that took him into top corporate offices as a partner working on a common goal. Those relationships helped him establish credibility and trust in the business community. Butkiewicz says. He remains active in the United Way as a director.

As a prominent labor representative, Butkiewicz attends numerous benefits for community organizations and has little time during the week for his wife Julia and two young children. He also has three children from a previous marriage and recently became a grandfather for the first time.

On weekends, Butkiewicz retreats to tend his pigs and sheep and play a little ball on his five acre homestead in Temecula. A serious baseball player during his youth in Arizona, he tended third base on one of the top summer high school teams in the country, and was offered college but had a young family to support. He has a diamond and a batting cage on his lot where he takes a few swings and helps his sons with the game.

Butkiewicz recently took his eldest son, Jerry, to meet a vice president at University Mechanical and Engineering Contractors, one of the unionized companies where Butkiewicz ran United Way campaigns. Frank Drachman was glad to discuss goal-setting and other career topics with the young geologist.

"I'd do anything Jerry Butkiewicz asked me to do," Drachman says. "On a personal basis, he's a great friend. On a professional basis, he's a huge, important leader in our community."

Butkiewicz's former boss, United Way President and CEO Bruce Boland, also is a staunch Butkiewicz fan. "He brings a tremendous amount of energy to whatever he does," says Boland. "The San Diego-Imperial County Labor Council is on a bright, fresh, new start with Jerry."

If there's one complaint colleagues have about Butkiewicz, it's his lack of punctuality. "The biggest drawback is getting Jerry to a meeting on time," quips Boland. "We always say, if we're 15 minutes into a meeting, 'Well, Jerry should be here any minute now.'"
From · Organized Labor, Monday, February 14, 2000

THE BUILDERS
By Stan Smith
Executive Secretary
San Francisco Building and Construction Trades Council

58TH CALIFORNIA STATE BUILDING TRADES CONVENTION

The two day Convention was called to order by State Building Trades President Bob Balgenorth on February 2, 2000, in San Diego. Opening the Convention was Art Lujan of San Diego County Building Trades Council. He did a very good job reporting on the many gains to turn around that anti-union city and it was made possible by working with the San Diego Central Labor Council.

Art was followed to the podium by Jerry Butkiewicz of the San Diego Labor Council who added to some issues addressed by Lujan. He told of the joint effort to defeat those City Council members who voted against the Project Labor Agreement for the new convention center. Both Councils emphasized that for the first time in many years, all unions are on the same page.

San Diego State Senator Steve Peace welcomed the delegates and reiterated the comments of Lujan and Butkiewicz on the importance of a united union labor movement and the good job that is being done. He said "for the first time in his political career, he was proud to say San Diego is a union town."
San Diego's not a good organized labor town? Who says?

Well, San Diego's never been a very good union town." Conventional wisdom holds this idea to be true. That's why the Republicans had their 1996 nominating convention in San Diego, and the Democrats will have theirs in more "labor-friendly" Los Angeles, the traditional thinking goes.

But a good number of folks on the front lines of San Diego labor relations would beg to differ with that hoary old chestnut. America's finest city may have been chilly to labor in the past, they say, but conditions are currently in a prolonged thaw.

Take Al Shur, for example. With periodic exceptions, he says, the local history of labor relations has been more compromise and negotiation than the strike-settlement cycle typical of cities like Los Angeles.

"People may think of LA as a better union town, but their labor relations through history have been contentious," says Shur, business manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 569. Plus, he says, "here in San Diego a higher percentage of electrical workers, outside utilities, are in the IBEW than LA. That's a fact."

Judy Beal agrees. The president of Communication Workers of America Local 9509 cites the booming local economy as one factor in the sunny state of local labor.

From a union perspective, she says, "it is easier to organize in prosperous times. There are many more new companies hiring more workers. Our prosperity has allowed us to work especially hard in the community, and to organize more." These increased efforts have doubled the number of workers her local represents to 5,000 since she
took office four years ago. This kind of real growth at the local chapter bests national trends, where expanded organizing has added to union rolls, but new members are largely replacing those whose union jobs were lost.

The picture is mixed, however, in the public sector. The mid-1990s were a high point in discord for some unions, especially with strikes by San Diego teachers and county workers. For county workers at least, relations have calmed since then. For example, in 1996, after a long and bitter negotiation, the bulk of county workers — those represented by Local 2028 of the Service Employees International Union — agreed to a 27-month contract. Then in 1998, SEIU and county negotiators signed pacts simultaneously settling a union lawsuit and approving a three-year contract.

Where the 1996 county agreement had taken more than two years to achieve, the latter contract was inked within hours of the old one's expiration.

Scott Barnett, executive director of the San Diego Taxpayers Association, observes that the Municipal Employees and the San Diego Police Officers associations have been particularly successful in pressing their demands with city officials.

"They are pretty much getting whatever they ask for," Barnett says. "The City Council has been anemic in dealing with its employee groups."

The Municipal Employees and San Diego Police Officers associations have been successful in their demands, says Scott Barnett.

(photo/Alan Decker)

The picture is much different at the San Diego Unified School District.

Following the disruptive strike in 1996, reports teacher union president Marc Knapp, former Superintendent Bertha Pendleton and the teachers' union leaders pledged to go to virtually any length to avoid future job actions.

Knapp says they invited the famed Harvard Negotiating Project — the same outfit that counseled the opponents in South Africa's transition from apartheid — to facilitate the district's next negotiation more peaceably.

"We used a method called interest-based bargaining," Knapp recalls. "I was skeptical
at first, but I changed my mind when I saw how collaboratively we could work together with the administration."

The result was a three-year contract in which, Knapp says, the union received much of what it requested and the district received an unprecedented number of concessions. "We actually won an award from Saturn Motors for labor-management collaboration," he says, "but by the time they were ready to come out and give it to us, we had the new administration (of Alan Bersin) and the new situation had completely turned around. We told them not to come."

Knapp says he anticipates tough sledding in the upcoming contact talks, which may start as early as this fall.

The collaboration and cooperation missing in the school district seem to be the key to success for the private sector unions. There, gains in union numbers and pay have occurred within a broader context of labor advances outside the scope of formal contract negotiations. For example, the CWA's Beal notes that when one of the union's largest employers, Pacific Bell, asked, her local joined company nonunion workers as tutors at the Polinsky Children's Center. Pacific Bell spokesman Maurice Luque adds that the CWA has also been willing to support the company on various issues before the Public Utilities Commission.

But perhaps more importantly, Pacific Bell executives gave moral and material support to their own building's janitors when they struck for higher wages and benefits last spring.

"They brought food and clothing and a lot of other stuff," Beal says. Further, Dave Nichols, Pac Bell's regional president, spoke at a press conference to support the janitors.

Local labor and management also are partnering on longer-term projects. One example is Kearny Mesa's San Diego Electrical Training Center, where IBEW Local 569 and the San Diego chapter of the National Electrical Contractors' Association run a five-year apprentice training program.

Some 340 apprentices work full time, then attend classes two nights a week, plus occasional weekends. Jim Westfall, the center's training director, says they begin with low-level "grunt work" on the jobsite such as hauling cable and stocking parts, while at night learning both the theory and practice of electricity.

For their labors, apprentices begin at $10 per hour, with guaranteed raises based on good work evaluations and classroom performance. Both their workplace duties and classroom learning become more sophisticated over time, and the center continually adds new courses to reflect industry...
needs. Upon graduation, the new journeymen and women can expect to earn about $50,000 annually, plus the other benefits of union employment, Westfall says.

The center recently added new programs in low voltage electrical work, says Westfall, including data transmission, building automation, and high-end audio and video systems. Clark Thompson, vice president of San Diego's Neal Electric, says that fiber, data and telecom now comprise a major portion of his firm's business, anticipating it will grow to 20 percent of the bottom line within months.

Journeymen and women also hone their skills at the center. Westfall says they must complete 18 hours of advanced training every year to stay current with their union. About 750 journeymen go back to school each year to participate in courses ranging from nuclear power plant operation to waste water treatment.

IBEW Local 569 President Emily Davis calls the training center "an extraordinary resource" and an "unbelievable benefit to our members."

The center trains its students to be the most skilled and most efficient, says Westfall, thus allowing its union electrical contractors to stay competitive in the construction bidding process.

Some local electrical contractors echo Westfall's comments. David Raspolich, vice-president and general manager of Dynalectic Co., one of San Diego's largest employers of electricians, calls the training center "the key to our existence."

"When we call the electricians' hiring hall," Raspolich says, "we know what those people can do. Only rarely do we get an unqualified person." He contrasted that situation with hiring at so-called "merit" or nonunion shops. "You bring in a candidate and ask him if he can do this or that, and he says yes. Then you sent him out in the field and he fails, and you have to start all over again with interviewing."

The reliability of training center graduates "is the most significant reason that we and other NECA members are union," Raspolich says.

But unions and employers don't necessarily have to cooperate in order to get well-trained workers, contends Russ Gould, president-elect of the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), a national organization dedicated to promoting merit shops in construction. ABC runs a local, state-approved apprentice program as well, Gould says. Because its curriculum parallels the union program, its graduates are as capable as any produced by the IBEW and NECA, he says. "I agree with (Dave Raspolich). Graduates of both programs are very able. What we don't want is a guy who has been 'hanging out,' maybe just working with his dad for 10 years. It's these guys that aren't capable of doing the work. But
our people are."

Gould argues that the benefit of the ABC apprentice program is that a journeyman graduate is not tied to the union.

"Our graduates are free to work for whoever they want. And they are not obligated to pay union dues."

Despite this kind of competition, Jerry Butkiewicz, secretary-treasurer of the Labor Council of San Diego and Imperial Counties, sees training as a strategic tool for unions.

"We should be able to provide the best-trained workers to our union employers," he says. "There should be apprentice programs for hotel workers, janitorial workers — all workers."

Butkiewicz observes that the American economy has fewer workers who spend their careers with a single employer. Employers, often in the high-tech sector, do massivehirings when new projects are undertaken, then lay off hundreds at a time when the projects wrap up.

These "migrating workers," as Butkiewicz calls them, should be able to have a union that will provide them with the training and benefits employers no longer do.

"Not only will it make for better workers, working under better conditions, but it will give these workers something to be loyal to &endash; their union."

Butkiewicz's thinking on training echoes an idea circulating nationally.

Dan Luria is vice president of the Michigan Manufacturing technology Institute. "The role for unions in a society that needs technical skills is to provide them. (Unions) will become more valuable to employers by providing a productivity premium to offset the wage premium."

Adding value to workers through training also suggests another way in which labor has broadened its community involvement — in strategic community partnerships.

The point man for this approach has been Butkiewicz himself. "Just because a project is good for management or the chamber of commerce, it doesn't mean it's not good for labor too," he explains. "When a project is right for the community, including union members, we will step up."

This logic propelled the Central Labor Council to join the San Diego Chamber in active support of Prop. A, the 1998 ballot measure on Convention Center expansion, and on the expansion of Qualcomm Stadium before that.

The Labor Council also strongly supported Prop. C in 1998, to build the new Padres ballpark as the cornerstone of the larger East Village redevelopment project. Butkiewicz has called the project San Diego's "field of dreams," and the Labor Council supported the $10 million in interim funding the City Council approved last
month.

For its part, the ballpark development team consented to a so-called "project-labor agreement," which guarantees various protections for workers — including local hiring, prevailing wages for all trades, and a no-strike clause. Padres officials have denied that the agreement is a payback for organized labor's vocal support.

Such issues-based agreement also has gained labor cooperation from the business community. For example, several people interviewed for this article suggested that organized labor's success in defeating Prop. 226 was due in part to the chamber's silence on the proposal. Prop. 226 would have required unions to obtain written approval from their rank-and-file members each year before a portion of her or his dues could be used for political campaigns. It appeared on the June 1998, statewide ballot.

Fahari Jeffers is secretary-treasurer and general counsel for the United Domestic Workers of America/AFSCME. She credits Butkiewicz with recognizing that union power could be used as a strategic tool to build alliances around the community. Jeffers feels that the current positive economic climate provides organized labor with a unique opportunity to build such partnerships.

"People who are civically active in this community and in the know agree that organized labor has a legitimate place at the table, whatever the table," she says. "If we build the right relationships, and are a real partner in the community, we will not be in the boat alone when the economy inevitably turns downward."

The CWA's Beal agrees. "I think people see unions now as having value. We're no longer just the people pounding on the table in the board room. Jerry brought the unions together for the first time in a long time. Labor now has a place at the community table."

Butkiewicz himself credits increasing community awareness of the issues unions have always represented — living wages, benefits, job security and retirement.

"The people of San Diego believe that people should be treated fairly," he says. "They weren't as aware of these issues 10 years ago. They were so worried about making ends meet that they couldn't worry about anyone else. In the economic condition we're in now, more people have something to share. But many of the people who are living more comfortably have been there. They know what it's like to not have health insurance for your kids. They are more willing to share."
Labor's clout at City Hall could be a mirage

As its influence fades, future seems cloudy

By Philip J. LaVelle
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

June 19, 2006

Enrique “Kiki” Carranza is worried these days, with good reason.
A married father of two, Carranza repairs cars and trucks for the
city of San Diego.

But his job – and hundreds of others – might be farmed out to the
private sector if a ballot measure pushed by Mayor Jerry Sanders is
approved in November.

Sanders says privatization will save the city money. Carranza says
his department works cheaper than private garages, and losing his
job would be “pretty devastating.”

How it plays out remains to be seen, but Carranza’s story is a
microcosm of a broader unrest sweeping San Diego’s political
landscape, with gains by labor unions now threatened on several fronts.

In addition to Sanders’ ballot package, criminal prosecutions of union officials tied up in the pension crisis and
electoral losses by labor-backed city candidates point to trouble for unions.

Labor’s political future is at a crossroads in San Diego. This has led some observers to question the line peddled
by many business and Republican leaders – that unions have undue leverage at City Hall.

The reality is more nuanced, they say.

“I think we see the swing of the pendulum, and we’ve seen this historically in San Diego on a number of
occasions, where one party of influence views themselves as controlling,” said Republican businessman Richard
Ledford, chief of staff in the early 1990s to then-Mayor Susan Golding.

“The truth is, nobody controls the council. What happens from time to time is people are elected who share views
with certain interest groups. But that does not translate into an absolute control by labor or by business ... we tend
to have a fair-minded, independent elected body.”

Labor has made political gains over the past decade, but they have not been realized by all unions. And it is
important to differentiate between those gains won by public-sector unions and those in the private sector.
Regardless, it is a development within the public sector – the chronic underfunding of the city’s pension system – that poses the greatest threat to labor clout at City Hall.

Beginning in 1996 and again in 2002, some – but not all – public-employee labor leaders agreed to allow the pension system to be underfunded. In exchange, the employees received boosts in retirement benefits. Both arrangements were engineered by city managers and promoted by Republican mayors.

Putting less into the pension-system tank while stepping on the gas helped open a gaping hole – $1.43 billion – in the retirement trust, which now gobbles up a large share of the total city budget.

The resulting financial debacle pushed Mayor Dick Murphy to resign from office last year and played a role in downgrades of the city’s credit ratings. It also inspired outside scrutiny of city finances and criminal investigations.

Last year, Ron Saathoff, president of the politically influential firefighters’ union, and John Torres, now the president of the Municipal Employees Association, were among several former pension board members charged with felonies by the District Attorney’s Office. This year, Saathoff and several other former pension officials were charged with federal crimes related to their pension dealings.

These events provided the spark that has fueled persistent criticism of unions, from The San Diego Union-Tribune editorial page to radio pundits.

'Unfairly charged'

Labor leaders say unions are taking unwarranted heat.

“We've been unfairly charged with the irresponsible conduct of administrators of the past,” said Bill Nemec, president of the San Diego Police Officers Association.

In 2002, the police union representative on the pension board voted with whistle-blower Diann Shipione against the underfunding plan. (His own membership later voted him off the board.)

The union representing blue-collar workers, Local 127 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, had no direct representation on the pension board during the underfunding votes.

Representatives of the Municipal Employees Association voted for the deal. Federal prosecutors allege Saathoff played a central role.

In the wake of the pension crisis, and the resulting squeeze on the city budget, the ability of public-sector unions to wrest favorable wage-and-benefit contracts out of City Hall has been weakened.

Just last year, the Murphy-led council voted to give a 4 percent pay hike to Municipal Employees Association members despite a deepening fiscal crisis. The union, which does not spend money on campaigns but provides foot soldiers for candidates, supported Murphy’s 2004 re-election.

Today, Sanders has made two November ballot measures, which could hurt thousands of public-employee union members, a central part of his agenda.

One measure would require voter approval of future pension benefit increases; the other would allow the city to
contract out existing municipal jobs. A council majority, including several members seen as pro-labor, agreed to let voters decide and voted to put both on the ballot.

Union leaders have vowed to fight back.

"I don't see us on the ropes," said Judie Italiano, who retired last month as president of the Municipal Employees Association. "Hard times in the workplace make us stronger, not weaker."

Things are more subtle when it comes to private-sector unions.

These unions, most of which fall under the AFL-CIO umbrella, have seen their biggest gains come in matters outside the direct jurisdiction of the City Council, notably in forging pro-worker agreements for downtown construction jobs.

For them, having a pro-labor majority on the City Council gave the appearance of clout, adding leverage at the bargaining table.

This implied clout helped them win contracts that ensured union workers got jobs. Some non-union contractors and business leaders say this has unfairly tilted the playing field. But on actual legislation, union success seems mixed. And a simple head count suggests unions have a less-than-reliable roster on the council.

Probably the greatest blue-collar victory at the council was last year's vote for a "living wage" ordinance, which will require private contractors working city jobs to pay more than the California minimum wage. It goes into effect next year.

Proponents said it would give workers a chance to live in pricey San Diego. Opponents called it government interference in the free market and the wrong move in the face of a worsening fiscal crisis.

Good public policy or bad, the living wage vote may be a marker of labor's high point at City Hall.

In two important votes this year, council majorities -- including several politicians traditionally seen as pro-labor -- sided with business interests over unions and worker advocates.

In February, a council majority voted for a new downtown development plan that critics said left out any requirements for higher pay or health-benefits.

In April, the council approved a legal settlement with the Building Industry Association that would have relieved some developers of higher fees intended to generate affordable-housing units.

It was seen as a big victory for developers, one of the key backers of Sanders, a Republican, in his 2005 victory over Councilwoman Donna Frye, a Democrat backed by the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council.

The settlement later fell apart and last month a judge declared the affordable-housing law unconstitutional, delighting some developers.

**Clout questioned**

Donald Cohen, president of the Center on Policy Initiatives, a pro-labor think tank, argues that labor clout at City Hall is overblown -- a myth led by conservative voices serving an anti-union agenda.
“Name one thing the City Council has done – besides ‘living wage’ – where the City Council created jobs (that) people could live on and that had health insurance?” Cohen said.

Pointing to the endless stream of land-use and development decisions that come out of City Hall, Cohen said: “The city creates more and more low-wage jobs, without health-care benefits, every day. Jobs that aren’t good for our regional economy.”

But significant gains have been made in privately negotiated construction contracts.

Some contractors say the implied clout with the council is used as leverage to force “project labor agreements” on major developments.

These arrangements between project managers and unions are intended to prevent strikes. Critics say they blunt competitive bidding.

Unions tried and failed in the 1990s to get a project labor agreement for the Convention Center expansion. By early 2000, after pressure from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, such a deal was struck for the Padres ballpark.

Tom Anderson, executive vice-president of non-union Berg Electric, a large electrical contractor, said his company was aced out of multimillion-dollar jobs on the Padres ballpark and on the related Ballpark Village project last year.

Anderson said the labor agreements were unfavorable to companies like his, even when they agreed to pay union wages. “These guys are just trying to grab what they can grab,” he said.

Former state Sen. Steve Peace, an adviser to Padres owner John Moores, denied that such deals were unfair or forced upon developers.

“The perception (of labor clout) is greatly exaggerated,” said Peace, who as an influential Democratic lawmaker mediated the final phase of the ballpark labor agreement.

However, Peace also said that the convergence of interests among elected officials, career bureaucrats and some public-sector unions has been bad for the public. He cited the pension situation as a prime example.

This sort of arrangement – in which public-sector unions and governments agree on huge pension benefit increases, a practice not unique to San Diego – can be explained in part by the great sweep of modern American labor history.

Facing sharp declines in private-sector union membership – a trend dating to the mid-1950s – union leaders have focused in recent years on beefing up public-sector unions. Last year, only 12.5 percent of all wage-and-salary workers in the United States belonged to labor unions, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. But 36.5 percent of government workers are unionized – and in local government, nearly 42 percent of all workers are in unions.

**Labor influence grows**
In San Diego, unions got a pro-labor majority on the council this decade.

Their first big gain came in 2001, with Frye's election to an open seat. A noted clean-water activist, she defeated better-funded Republican opponent Steve Danon in a tough race.

By 2002, former firefighters' union lobbyist Michael Zucchet was elected to the 2nd District seat, traditionally held by Republicans, giving Democrats a six-vote majority on the council, at the time a nine-member body.

But this majority turned shaky the next year when federal prosecutors launched their investigation into three councilmen suspected of taking money from a Las Vegas strip club mogul in exchange for conspiring to relax San Diego's no-touch law prohibiting contact with strippers.

Zucchet and fellow Democrats Ralph Inzunza and Charles Lewis were indicted. Lewis died in 2004, and Zucchet and Inzunza resigned last year after being convicted. Seven of Zucchet's convictions were thrown out by the judge, and he is set for re-trial on the remaining two; federal prosecutors are deciding whether to appeal.

The aftermath has left labor with less influence on the council.

Lewis' successor, Tony Young, is not seen by labor strategists as a reliable union vote. The seat vacated by Zucchet was won by his Republican opponent in the 2002 contest, public-relations executive Kevin Faulconer, who defeated union-backed Democrat Lorena Gonzalez.

Murphy's departure also left a void for labor in the mayor's office. Although Murphy had no labor backing when elected in 2000, he became a close ally of the Municipal Employees Association and the firefighters. Both groups benefited from Murphy-led policies and supported his re-election in 2004.

Today, Sanders' ballot measures are where the anti-union backlash finds its clearest expression.

Sanders backers, including many business leaders, say it's time union power was curbed.

"Public employee unions are very powerful," said Reint Reinders, who retires this month after 15 years as chief executive of the San Diego Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"They play a huge role in elections, and when they get their people in power, they expect to get their conditions bettered, their pensions improved. But you just have to read the paper and see that we are in a difficult situation, and it calls for drastic actions, and drastic actions are not in the vocabulary of the unions."

For Carranza, the city vehicle mechanic, the overarching political struggle is an abstraction. The push to privatize his job is not. He's seen such proposals come around before and little has come of them. But today it has fresh urgency, and possibly more momentum.

Sanders has "basically gotten an idea like every mayor before him, and is pushing it through," Carranza said. "Our division is a pretty good target for that over the years. Pretty much everybody thinks they can fix a truck cheaper, know what I mean?"

Union leaders like to compare Sanders' ballot aims to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's disastrous bid last year to fight union power through several ballot measures – all of which went down to defeat. They also say the current backlash obscures the good that unions have done.
"It's fashionable to bash unions these days," said Joan Raymond, president of Local 127 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers. "People need to remember it was unions that gave us the eight-hour day and weekends. ... Without our union, our workers would be totally at the mercy of the boss."

Find this article at:

--- Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.
History of labor's rise

June 18, 2006

Key points in organized labor's political rise in San Diego

1988

- District-only elections of San Diego City Council members approved by voters.

1996

- Jerry Butkiewicz, a pragmatic centrist, becomes secretary-treasurer of San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council.
- First major underfunding of San Diego City Employees Retirement System begins.

1998

- Convention Center expansion approved by voters.
- Padres ballpark approved by voters.

2000

- Project-labor agreement reached for Padres ballpark construction.

2001

- Democratic activist Donna Frye elected to City Council.

2002

- Closed-door bid by council to impose labor terms on SeaWorld falls apart.
- Second major arrangement to underfund the city pension system approved by mayor and council.
- Former firefighters' union lobbyist Democrat Michael Zucchet elected to City Council.
- Pension deficit approaching $1 billion revealed.

2004

- City's financial problems grow, credit ratings lowered.
- Republican Mayor Dick Murphy re-elected with some public-employee union support.
2005

“Living wage” ordinance passed by council.

- District Attorney’s Office files felony charges against former pension board members, including Ron Saathoff, president of the firefighters’ union, and John Torres, then-vice president of the Municipal Employees Association.

- Murphy resigns as city fiscal crisis deepens.

- Councilmen Ralph Inzunza, Michael Zucchet resign after federal corruption convictions.

- Ballpark Village project-labor agreement signed.

- Republican Jerry Sanders defeats Frye in San Diego mayor’s race.

2006

- Federal grand jury indicts former pension officials, including firefighters union president Ron Saathoff.

- Republican Kevin Faulconer defeats Democrat Lorena Gonzalez for City Council.

- City Council votes to put Mayor Jerry Sanders’ propositions on November ballot: one would authorize privatization of city jobs, the other would require voter approval of future pension benefit increases.

---Compiled by staff writer Philip J. LaVelle

---

Find this article at:
http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20060618/news_mz1n18labhis.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.
Labor leader is planning to resign

Butkiewicz won’t seek fourth term

By Matthew T. Hall and Jennifer Vigil
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITERS

October 19, 2007

SAN DIEGO – Jerry Butkiewicz, the region’s leading union official and one of San Diego’s most influential political figures, will resign at year’s end from a post he has used to boost labor’s fortunes and pay since 1996.

Butkiewicz, 54, told his family last month and his board Wednesday of his decision, then with word rushing across town, confirmed it yesterday before appearing on the Roger Hedgecock radio show to talk about a dispute involving development and union jobs on the Chula Vista bayfront.

It will surprise no one who knows Butkiewicz or his punchy rhetorical skills that he called questions about whether he was asked or ordered to leave “a joke.”

He said he is stepping down as secretary-treasurer of the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council because he doesn’t have a fourth four-year term in him and doesn’t want the labor council to have to appoint – instead of elect – a new leader.

Butkiewicz, a former postal worker and union leader, extended labor’s reach to new local heights as the head of the council, an umbrella organization that represents 118 unions and about 120,000 union members.

“Jerry has moved cooperation between labor and business to a high never seen in San Diego,” said Port Commission member and close friend Steve Cushman.

“Sometimes it was adversarial, but it’s always been good to have Jerry in the room,” said John Hawkins, president of Cloud 9 Shuttle and a former San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce board chairman.

As a member of the chamber board brought on at Cushman’s behest, Butkiewicz paired with business and political leaders to make labor part of an effort that secured voter approval of the Convention Center expansion, a San Diego schools overhaul and the downtown Padres ballpark.

Campaign contributions and volunteers from his organization also helped elect several labor-friendly City Council members, giving San Diego a two-thirds Democratic majority that lasted until 2005. That council helped push through a Butkiewicz priority, a living-wage ordinance that increased the pay of employees of companies contracting with the city.

“He took a moribund labor-union movement and made the needs of working people central to the politics of San Diego,” said political consultant Larry Remer, who has worked closely with organized labor over the years.
Councilwoman Toni Atkins, a labor ally, praised Butkiewicz as a pragmatic leader who didn't just think about the win today, but the bigger picture and the long term.

Council President Scott Peters, who has tangled with Butkiewicz over a Port District appointment and raising wages for city contract workers, applauded his frankness.

"So many special-interest groups are represented by rock-throwers," Peters said. "Labor has been fortunate to have someone who's articulate about explaining his group's needs and listening to what the other side needs."

Butkiewicz said he couldn't have done it alone.

"There are so many accomplishments, but it's really not fair for me to take credit for any of them," he said. "A lot of people have helped me be successful in the last 12 years."

Despite such modesty, union, business and political leaders seemed united in praise for Butkiewicz yesterday, a rarity in a city where divisions run deep.

"He at least for a time took that tag of 'adversary' away," said Richard Ledford, a businessman who served as former Mayor Susan Golding's chief of staff. "Labor was something to be courted, even for the business community."

In recent months, Butkiewicz has been on the defensive, with critics accusing labor of sabotaging Tennessee-based Gaylord Entertainment's plan to develop the Chula Vista bayfront. Those plans were waylaid after negotiations between the company and labor broke off, but Gaylord resumed talks with government officials in August.

Jim Ryan, president of the Associated General Contractors of San Diego County, had high praise for Butkiewicz until it came to Gaylord.

"Before Jerry became involved, (business and labor) just automatically drew a line in the sand, and if one side crossed, the other would punch," Ryan said. "(With Butkiewicz, I think) we have worked together for the betterment of the community... except on Gaylord."

Butkiewicz was elected secretary-treasurer in 1996 and re-elected in 2000 and 2004. The next election will be in April 2008.

There's early indication that he favors the labor council's political director, Lorena Gonzalez, for the top spot, although neither would comment on that last night.

Mickey Kasparian, head of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 135 in San Diego and Imperial counties and president of the labor council, said Butkiewicz brought unprecedented energy and enthusiasm to the labor movement.

"What he has done is be able to build a coalition, and I think the key word is unity," Kasparian said. "All the pieces are in place for his successor to walk into a very good situation."

That may be, but the departure also comes at an unsteady time for city government because its leadership is about to change. Business and labor interests suspect the council's 5-3 Democratic majority could easily shift.

Four new City Council members will be elected next year because term limits will force incumbents out. Also, Mayor Jerry Sanders is up for re-election and is hardly a darling of organized labor, which is searching for a challenger.

Staff writer David Washburn contributed to this report.

Matthew Hall: (619) 542-4599:

Find this article at:

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

*Copyright 2007 Union-Tribune Publishing Co. A Gannett Newspaper Site*
Butkiewicz, Who Turned Local Labor Into a 'Vital Force', to Step Down

The son of a union painter, Jerry Butkiewicz rose through the ranks of organized labor as a postal clerk and expanded its reach into politics and business.

By

Friday, Oct. 19, 2007 | Jerry Butkiewicz said Thursday that he will step down as the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council's secretary-treasurer at the end of the year after serving as its lead executive and power broker for more than a decade.

"I think the time is right," he said. "In the labor movement, we have many people who are really really qualified to continue working for San Diego's families.

During his tenure, organized labor made significant inroads in local politics and business, lending vital support to the campaigns of local elected officials and projects such as Petco Park. Butkiewicz forged unusually strong relationships with the local business community and became the first labor leader to sit on the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce's board of directors.

"He's been one of the iconic figures in San Diego's political structure," said Scott Alevy, the chamber's vice president of public policy. "Anytime someone like that leaves, it makes a difference."

Butkiewicz's resignation comes less than a year before he would have to seek re-election for another four-year term, which he said he did not want to have to complete. His resignation is effective at the end of 2007, at which point the board representing 120,000 unionized workers would appoint an interim secretary-treasurer until April's election of a permanent successor.

The 54-year-old Butkiewicz said he is recommending Lorena Gonzalez, who has served as the labor council's political director for the past year, as his successor. Gonzalez, a candidate in the 2005 City Council race for District 2 and a former aide to ex-Gov. Cruz Bustamante, declined to comment.

The son of a union painter and the descendant of Polish immigrants, Butkiewicz rose through the ranks of organized labor as a postal clerk. In 1996, the Labor Council elected Butkiewicz to be its top executive, a move that has elevated union visibility in the political and business affairs of a region that, relative to other urban centers, has been reluctant to embrace the labor movement.

"He has really inserted labor into the politics of a town that has never been very pro-union," said Joan Raymond, the president of the American Federation of State County Municipal Employees Local 127, which represents blue-collar municipal workers. "He changed the whole face of it."

Under Butkiewicz's charge, the labor council has become a major player in elections by raising money and enlisting its membership to walk precincts for its favorite candidates. As an organization, the labor council and other unions can spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on elections, rivaled only by a handful of other local donors and the county's political parties.

Union members were instrumental in the passage of San Diego Unified School District's major school construction bond measure in 1998 and the campaigns for a downtown ballpark and the San
Diego Convention Center's expansion.

Labor-backed candidates comprise a majority of the San Diego City Council. Union backing also helped sway other key political races, such as the 2000 election of Susan Davis to Congress and Donna Frye's near-victory in the 2004 mayor's race despite her emergence as a write-in candidate just weeks before the contest.

"He's done an amazing job. He's turned organized labor into the most vital force in progressive politics and working people in San Diego," political consultant Larry Remer said.

With that leverage, and backed by the colorful presentations Butkiewicz was known for, the labor council has fought successfully for worker-friendly causes, such as the living-wage ordinance, which requires city of San Diego contractors to pay workers about $10 an hour plus health benefits; favorable working conditions and wages in the public works projects; and increased pension benefits for city workers.

But labor has endured its own hardships during Butkiewicz's tenure. Politicians such as Mayor Jerry Sanders and City Attorney Mike Aguirre blame the unions' political influence as the cause of the deals that left the city a $1 billion pension deficit. The teachers unions were demonized by former Superintendent Alan Bersin for criticizing the reform agenda he pushed during his seven-year run at the school district. This summer, business leaders lashed at local construction unions after Gaylord Entertainment accused them of killing its plans for a bay-front resort in Chula Vista by making unreasonable demands.

And despite its moniker as The San Diego Union-Tribune, the local newspaper's editorial page has hammered at organized labor, prompting some unions to call for a boycott of the paper.

Through the turmoil of the public criticism and the realities of balancing the needs of 118 different unions, Butkiewicz is credited with maintaining stability under labor's regional umbrella organization. Additionally, when the national labor movement experienced its own fissures as unions broke off AFL-CIO to form Change to Win in 2005, Butkiewicz was tasked with keeping major parts of the local AFL-CIO organization together.

"Jerry kept everybody working together under the central labor council when the top labor leaders in Washington, D.C. were broken apart," said Jen Badgley, an organizer with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 569.

In the business community, Butkiewicz made strides, earning a reputation as a broker who could help solve disputes between companies and workers in times of tumult.

"We worked together, mostly behind the scenes, to settle disputes before they became contentious, before they became strikes," said former auto dealer and Port Commissioner Stephen Cushman. "He won't always tell you what you want to hear, but he'll always tell you the truth."

As the former chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, Cushman invited Butkiewicz to be the first labor leader to serve on the business organization's executive board. Cushman owes his unprecedented third term as port commissioner to Butkiewicz, whose labor organization led a successful lobby of the San Diego City Council to reappoint Cushman despite pressure from Sanders and others to do otherwise.

Such is the product of the relationships Butkiewicz was able to fashion in a community that has largely resisted union influence. The individual bonds he maintained will leave with his departure, creating a void that draws mixed expectations from local politics about his successor.

"It could be a while before anyone can get the across-the-board, universal support that he has," Alevy said. "It didn't come overnight; it took a lot of years."

Labor leaders said they are confident that the organization Butkiewicz will leave in his wake is prepared.
"Maybe his biggest accomplishment is that the movement he created will carry on," said Donald Cohen, executive director of the Center on Policy Initiatives, a think tank, and a former political director under Butkiewicz. "We now have a web of relationships and a lot of talent that will take labor to the next step."

Butkiewicz said he will continue to serve the labor community after his resignation on a volunteer basis if his successor solicits his help. "I'll probably be walking precincts," he said.

In the meantime, Butkiewicz said he will help the organization undergo a smooth transition during his last few months. He said he is looking forward to spending time with his family before searching for his next job.

It's unlikely he'll seek his old job as a post office clerk, he said.

"I've been replaced by scanners."

Please contact directly with your thoughts, ideas, personal stories or tips. Or

Jerry Butkiewicz (right), seen here with Chula Vista Councilman John McCann, plans to resign from the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council at the end of 2007. Photo:
Kevin Dayton

From: Alexander Holstein [valiantstrike@yahoo.com]
Sent: Wednesday, November 14, 2007 11:29 PM
To: 'George Hawkins', SFiar@henselphaps.com; 'Eric Christen'; Kevin Dayton; 'Doug Sain'; 'Robert Castaneda', JohnWainio@aol.com; 'T.J. Zane'; Tony P. Krvaric; 'WILLIAM BABER'; 'alicia pivirootto'; 'Ashley Aluisi'; 'Breanna Roe Kingsbury'; 'Philip L. Thalheimer'; carl@carlomegaio.com
Subject: ABC Op-Ed in Daily Transcript: Butkiewicz legacy deserves a harder look
Importance: High

Butkiewicz legacy deserves a harder look

By GEORGE HAWKINS

Wednesday, November 14, 2007

Jerry Butkiewicz, the head of the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council, is retiring after 12 years in the position. Local business, community and political leaders have responded with generally positive comments about Butkiewicz and his activities on behalf of union members in the San Diego area.

But the commendation must occur in proper context. Just because someone did a fine job advancing an agenda doesn't mean that the agenda was right, nor does it mean that the tactics used to achieve that agenda were appropriate or ethical. Let's set aside our moral relativism and examine a few of Butkiewicz's achievements, starting with his celebrated assistance in winning voter approval of the new San Diego Padres ballpark.

San Diego's labor unions supported the ballot measure for Petco Park in 1998, but after voters approved the deal, the local electricians' union used environmental objections to block construction of the stadium.

Once the developer agreed to a Project Labor Agreement guaranteeing union workers would build the stadium, the environmental problems were "mitigated" and the project moved forward. More than 80 percent of the local construction work force was excluded from the work simply because they made a choice not to belong to a union.

Some people see nothing wrong with abusing environmental laws in order to achieve a union monopoly on large construction projects, as occurred with Petco Park. Butkiewicz apparently sees value in this tactic, as he is now using it against Gaylord Entertainment as this resort company attempts to build a hotel and convention center in Chula Vista. All is done under the questionable principle that "If the unions can't get all the work, no one will get any work."

Butkiewicz is also credited for his role in electing a pro-union majority to the San Diego City Council. This recognition should be tempered by the understanding that it is easy to be generous with other people's money, whether it is collected through mandatory union dues from workers or mandatory employer payments made to union-managed trust funds.

Butkiewicz was so successful in using union power and resources in local elections that State Senator Steve Peace declared at a State Building and Construction Trades Council convention in 2000 that "for the first time in his political career," he was proud to say San Diego is a "union town." Unfortunately, a common element of "union towns" across the country is fiscal irresponsibility and mismanagement, a lack of accountability to citizens, and corruption in local government.
Some of the candidates backed by Butkiewicz and his union political machine subjected San Diego to national disbelief and ridicule after they took office. No one would have guessed in 1996, when Butkiewicz attained his position, that squeaky-clean San Diego would soon become mired in scandals involving policies that under-funded the city employee pension system and bribery from strip club owners.

Ultimately, consideration of Butkiewicz’s legacy depends on whether or not you believe that government should play a role in coercing workers to join or be represented by a union. Associated Builders and Contractors believes that governments should award construction contracts based on the ability of the contractor and its workers to successfully complete the work on-time at the most reasonable price, regardless of the union affiliation of the workers. We believe fair and open competition leads to the most efficient expenditure of taxpayer funds.

Butkiewicz and other local union leaders instead place a priority on using taxpayer funds to strengthen organized labor. Butkiewicz showed a firm commitment to his cause, but that cause was generally misguided, the tactics used to advance the agenda were sometimes inappropriate or unethical, and the alliances with business groups were often based on brazen self-interest.

George Hawkins is President and CEO of the Associated Builders and Contractors of San Diego, composed of 280 companies employing more than 15,000 construction workers.