

*(Note: This is an excerpt from the original article; the last few paragraphs have been omitted).*

## **THE 9/11 DISAPPEAREDS**

When 21-year-old Fernando Jimenez Molina failed to return from his job delivering pizzas two blocks from the collapsed twin towers on September 11, his roommates, also undocumented immigrants, made the grim decision to warn his mother, Nora Elsa Molina, in Mexico. Then they headed for Asociacion Tepeyac, a Mexican community organization that emerged as the city's alternative emergency system for the immigrant workers, families and binational communities whose lives and livelihoods lay buried beneath the smoldering rubble.

While these September 11 victims slipped through the cracks in federal relief systems, Tepeyac shifted into crisis mode as soon as the first workers covered with soot and ash stumbled into its office. Arnulfo Chino Rojas “appeared like a ghost, stricken with sadness and pain, frightened and white with dust,” said a staff member. Arnulfo squeezed time from his long hours as a waiter at The World Trade Center to teach Mexican dance classes for the association. He and the other dazed workers who converged on the center soon joined Tepeyac's director, Joel Magallon, a Jesuit priest, in cobbling up an emergency response system.

“Undocumented immigrants are the invisible workers and victims of the disaster,” says Brother Joel. Tepeyac, a network of forty Mexican organizations in the city and upstate New York, has firsthand knowledge of sixty-three desaparecidos, sixty-five small-business closings and 3,095 lost jobs, roughly half of which were held by undocumented workers in and around the trade center. The disappeared came from Mexico and several other countries. Many immigrants worked seventy- and eighty-hour weeks at subminimum wages or off the books for cash in restaurants, cafes, bakeries, hotels, for custodial companies, cleaning shoes, selling flowers and newspapers, and ascending the twin towers to deliver coffee, newspapers, flowers and gifts.

Brother Joel insists, “The only way we can know for sure who is missing is for the employers to cooperate. They are the ones who have lists of who was working for them, documented or undocumented. But the employers are afraid that they will be penalized. We want the INS to waive employer sanctions so companies can come forward.”

Frantic family members and co-workers flooded Tepeyac with local and international calls. As word of the group's good deeds spread, AFL-CIO unions, churches, community organizations, businesses and individuals donated \$35,000, which Tepeyac quickly dispensed to victims and their families. The organization is now working with the Red Cross and Safe Horizon to obtain further relief and has dispatched volunteers as far as Guatemala and El Salvador to test relatives with DNA kits so that the remains of loved ones can be identified.

“Jane” who asked that her real name be withheld, turned to Tepeyac after two lengthy visits to the Family Assistance Center on Pier 94 left her empty-handed because she could not produce a pay stub. She worked as a nanny to a 4-year-old before her employers disappeared on September 11. A member of Freedom and Unity Among Pilipina Workers, Jane groaned, “What domestic worker do you know gets a pay stub?” Thanks to Tepeyac's intervention, Jane finally received a \$50 grocery voucher and the promise of Red Cross vouchers of \$300 for rent and \$250 for emergency cash for one month. Joining the tens of thousands of immigrants who have lost their jobs in recent weeks, Jane wonders how she will support herself, her husband and two children back home once the emergency funds run out. Like all undocumented workers, she is not eligible for FEMA assistance or unemployment benefits.

Immigrant communities, hard-hit by recession and lacking the cushion of a safety net, are also gripped with fear as the Bush Administration recasts immigration policy within the framework of national security and the war on terrorism. Before September 11, patient community education, organizing, coalition-building and lobbying for humane immigration policies had begun to bear fruit, especially with the AFL-CIO's shift last year toward opposing employer sanctions and calling for unconditional amnesty for un@ocumented workers. After Mexican President Vicente Fox's visit Cere this past summer, George W. Bush and Congressional leaders had begun to discuss a limited program of “phased legalization”—although this was coupled with an exploitative guest-worker program without a guarantee of permanent residency—while Congressman Luis Gutierrez had crafted progressive legalization legislation. Now the amnesty debate is on hold in Washington, and community groups are steeling themselves for reversals on hard-fought battles against Border Patrol violence, INS raids and detentions and racial profiling. Catherine Tactaquin, director of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, says, “We're hit with a revival of historic patterns of fear, hatred, of fingering immigrants as threats to national security.”

~~~~~  
By Miriam Ching Louie, Miriam Ching Louie is the author of *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Factory* (South End).

---

Copyright of **Nation** is the property of Nation Company, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

**Source:** Nation, 12/3/2001, Vol. 273 Issue 18, p7, 2p.

**Item Number:** 5678796