

THE NEW OTANI HOTEL

The New Otani Hotel was mired in controversy from its inception. As a part of the Redevelopment of Little Tokyo in the 1970's, it took up a large area of Weller Street on which many community organizations and cultural artists were housed. In addition, the building of this luxury hotel forced the relocation of many low-income tenants who were living in small hotel/apartments on Weller Street. The construction of the hotel was done by the Kajima Corporation, a world-wide industrial firm that had somehow managed to become a part of the redevelopment process affecting Little Tokyo.



Tony Osumi helps lead a rally for unionization

known until the conflict over the displaced tenants brought all of this out into the open.

Many of the members of NCCR had their roots in the Little Tokyo Peoples Rights organization (LTPRO). This group of community minded activists had a long history of struggling with the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) over the issue of low-income housing and affordable rents for cultural artists. Maintaining that the CRA had sacrificed the welfare of the people of Little Tokyo in favor of a luxury hotel, the stage was set for a conflict when a unionization effort was started at the New Otani by many of the workers.



Although early efforts were made to organize workers when the hotel opened in 1977, the attempt by Local 11 of the Hotel Workers and Restaurant Employees was the most determined one. In January of 1996, it organized a boycott of the hotel in which large numbers of

Los Angeles city officials and community organizations, including those from Little Tokyo, participated. NCRR, due to its ongoing concern for the well being of the residents and workers of Little Tokyo was quick to join the boycott and work cooperatively with the effort to unionize the New Otani. The New Otani/Kajima group has so far managed to elude the unionization effort, partly due to an unfriendly National Labor Relations Board and tactics often used by big business to



NCRR boycott supporters, Mary Katayama, Richard Katsuda, Kay Ochi, & Kathy Masaoka

divide and discourage workers. The issue is still in doubt and many still boycott the New Otani to this day.