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## Labor Leader Dolores Huerta Opens Creating Change Conference

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By Sean Kennedy



**The 21st Creating Change conference got off to a rousing start Thursday night in Denver when labor legend Dolores Huerta concluded the opening speech by repeating "si se puede" along with some 2,000 people in the audience, everyone clapping hands in time to the chant. The annual activist gathering put on by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force -- its slogans: "Power is sexy," "Action is hot" -- makes its debut in the Mountain West this year, and, organizers say, despite the hard economic times, attendance is expected to be on par, if not exceed, last year's turnout in Detroit.**

As the passage of Proposition 8 rallied the grassroots of the gay-rights movement in the form of Join the Impact protests and other demonstrations, so it has the hardcore activists at Creating Change, whose mission is to help its attendees, yes, create change. The schedule for the conference, which closes Sunday, includes everything anyone would need to start a personal revolution: organizing trainings; information sessions dispensing useful data and research; roundtables on HIV/AIDS, youth and sex, Islam and homosexuality, the transgender agenda, and more; and panels galore, from "Getting Heard on the Hill" to "Whose Body is It? Asserting the Queer Disabled Body." Even the Join the Impact founders, Amy Balliett and Willow Witte, are on hand, offering advice on how to harness online media for mass actions.

And, of course, there's inspiration from veteran activists like Huerta, who cofounded the pioneering United Farm Workers in 1962 with Cesar Chavez and has supported gay rights for a long time. Her efforts stretch from campaigning for Harvey Milk to recording a bilingual anti-Prop.

8 ad this fall; she also makes a point of referencing gays in her speeches, like President Obama did on the stump.

Huerta began her address by talking about economic justice, castigating the Wall Street fat cats who took in more than \$18 billion in bonuses last year, but then moved into the challenges the gay community faces now. While she recognized that people are highly motivated in the aftermath of last fall's stinging defeats at the ballot box, she also encouraged the attendees to break out of their comfort zones and really get in people's faces. She recalled the efforts involved in the UFW's wildly successful boycott of California table grapes in the late 1960s, which got 14 million Americans to stop buying the fruit and forced major concessions from the grape growers. "We were handing out 25,000 leaflets a day in New York City!" she said of the boycott, which involved organizers all over the country and made the labor dispute a national issue.

"We have to do more," Huerta said. "We've got to get out there and talk to people who really don't agree with us," adding that Gandhi often said that conflict is good, "because if you don't have conflict, you can't make the changes."

She also took a jab at fallen pastor Ted Haggard, whose interview on *Larry King Live* aired Thursday night. "Mr. Haggard is so sad," she said. "I think we should all pray for him to get the courage to come out. It's so pathetic!"

Then she led a series of "vivas" (as in "long live") for Milk, Chavez, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Task Force, before turning to her incantation of "si se puede," a phrase Huerta invented and that the new president appropriated.

"When I met Obama, he said, 'I stole your slogan,' " she said with a laugh. "I told him, 'Yes you did!' "

By the end of her speech, everyone was standing and shouting, as if it were a rally for migrant workers as much as one for gays. But as Huerta would say, the fight's the same: We all deserve our human rights. (Sean Kennedy, Advocate.com)