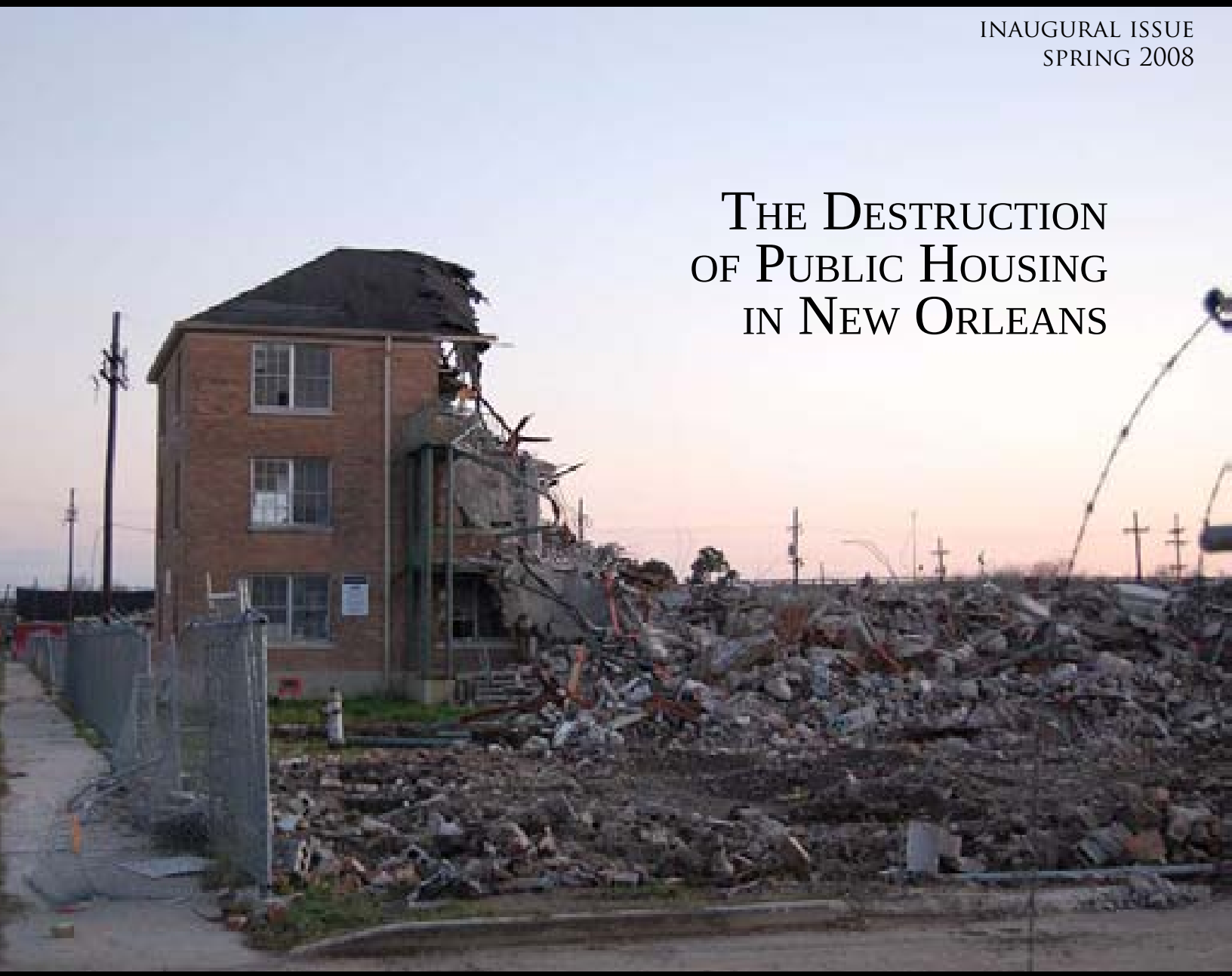
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ARISE

New Orleans Indymedia Quarterly

INAUGURAL ISSUE
SPRING 2008



The Destruction of Public Housing in New Orleans

New Orleans Independent Media Center • neworleans.indymedia.org

ARISE is a call to action, to confront issues deeply rooted and ever-affecting our communities. It is an attempt to open up an engaging space that will add to the conversations that educate and inspire people to act.

This is the print spin-off of New Orleans Indymedia, a news and story-oriented website designed for everyone to self-publish articles, photos, audio and video for the world to see. Knowing that internet access is limited, our purpose in making this quarterly was to democratize information.

To continue that process, we know that every reader is a writer with stories to contribute.

The New Orleans Chapter of the worldwide Indymedia Network was established in 2003. The network is an alternative non-commercial model for grassroots journalism on topics of local, national and international concern. As a local unit, we seek to provide an open flow of information by and for Louisianans, particularly the greater New Orleans community and those who are typically under-represented in media production and content.

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cover photo by Christian Roselund

This handmade sign attached to a telephone pole is one piece of an ongoing public art project known as NOLA Rising. A feud has built up over the last year between artists and the "Grey Ghost," the nickname for a man hired by the city of New Orleans to paint over grafitti. A lone painter-by-hire, the Grey Ghost started painting over this art as well as on people's personal property against their wishes. As a comment on what constitutes art, Dirty Coast, a social art company, produced "Grey is Art" shirts.



Half New Orleans Poor Permanently Displaced: Failure or Success?

By Bill Quigley

NEW ORLEANS—Government reports confirm that half of the working poor, elderly and disabled who lived in New Orleans before Katrina have not returned. Because of critical shortages in low cost housing, few now expect tens of thousands of poor and working people to ever be able to return home.

The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) reports Medicaid, medical assistance for aged, blind, disabled and low-wage working families, is down 46% from pre-Katrina levels. DHH reports before Katrina there were 134,249 people in New Orleans on Medicaid. February 2008 reports show participation down to 72,211 (a loss of 62,038 since Katrina). Medicaid is down dramatically in every category: by 50% for the aged, 53% for blind, 48% for the disabled and 52% for children.

The Social Security Administration documents that fewer than half the elderly are back. New Orleans was home to 37,805 retired workers who received Social Security before Katrina, now there are 18,940 – a 50% reduction. Before Katrina, there were 12,870 disabled workers receiving Social Security Disability in New Orleans, now there are 5350 – 59% less. Before there were 9425 widowers in New Orleans receiving Social Security survivor's benefits, now there are less than half, 4140.

Children of working class families have not returned. Public school enrollment in New Orleans was 66,372 before Katrina. Latest figures are 32,149 – a 52% reduction.

Public transit numbers are down 75% since Katrina. Prior to Katrina there were frequently over 3 million rides per month. In January 2008, there were 732,000 rides. The Regional Transit Authority says the reduction reflects that New Orleans has far fewer poorer, transit dependent residents.

Figures from the Louisiana Department of Social Services show the number of families receiving food stamps in New Orleans has dropped from 46,551 in June of 2005 to 22,768 in January 2008. Welfare numbers are also down. The Louisiana Families Independence Temporary Assistance Program was down from 5764 recipients (mostly children) in

July 2005 to 1412 in the latest report.

While there are no precise figures on the racial breakdown of the poor and working people still displaced, indications strongly suggest they are overwhelmingly African American. The black population of New Orleans has plummeted by 57 percent, while white population fell 36 percent, according to census data. The areas which are fully recovering are more affluent and predominately white. New Orleans, which was 67 percent black before Katrina, is estimated to be no higher than 58 percent black now.


Matthew Shelton

The reduction in poor and low-wage workers in New Orleans is no surprise to social workers. Don Everard, director of social service agency Hope House, says New Orleans is a much tougher town for poor people than before Katrina.

"Housing costs a lot more and there is much less of it," says Everard. "The job market is also very unstable. The rise in wages after Katrina has mostly fallen backwards and people are not getting enough hours of work on a regular basis."

The displacement of tens of thousands of people is now expected to be permanent because there is both a current shortage of affordable housing and no plan to create affordable rental housing for tens of thousands of the displaced.

In the most blatant sign of government action to reduce the numbers of poor people in New Orleans, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is demolishing thousands of intact public housing apartments. HUD is spending nearly a billion dollars with questionable developers to end up with much less affordable housing. Right after Katrina, HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson predicted New Orleans was "not going to be as black as it was for a long time, if ever again." He then worked to make that prediction true.

According to Policy Link, a national research institute, the crisis in affordable housing means barely 2 in 5 renters in Louisiana can return to affordable homes. In New Orleans, all the funds currently approved by HUD and other government agencies (not spent, only approved) for housing for low-income renters will only rebuild one-third of the pre-Katrina affordable rental housing stock.

Hope House sees four to five hundred needy people a month. "Most of the people we see are working people facing eviction, utility cutoffs, or they are already homeless" reports Everard. The New Orleans homeless population has already doubled from pre-Katrina numbers to approximately 12,000 people.

Everard noted that because of FEMA's recent announcement that it was closing 35,000 still occupied trailers across the gulf, homelessness is likely to get a lot worse.

United Nations officials recently called for an immediate halt to the demolitions of public housing in New Orleans saying demolition is a violation of human rights and will force predominately black residents into homelessness.

"The spiraling costs of private housing and rental units, and in particular the demolition of public housing, puts these communities in further distress, increasing poverty and homelessness," said a joint statement by UN experts in housing and minority issues. "We there-

CONTINUED to PAGE 5

Indian Shipyard Workers Accuse Employer of Human Trafficking and Forced Labor



New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice

By Damien Ramos and Robert Caldwell

March 11—Shortly after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, hundreds of Indian welders and fitters were trafficked to the Gulf Coast. For a hefty fee of $20,000, the recruiters promised the workers good jobs, permanent residency, and a chance to bring their families to the US. Workers sold their homes, took high-interest loans, and plunged their families into debt to pay for the American Dream.

When they arrived they discovered that all of the promises that had been made to them were false. They learned that in fact there were no green cards for them: they would not receive permanent status and they would remain separated from their families. Surely this was better than the way they had lived in India they were told, but many of the workers had worked in several countries and the accommodations here were the worst of all.

When these workers decided that they needed to organize for more humane treatment and to demand that the company make good on the promises made to them the company responded by sending armed guards into the labor camps, pulling the organizers out of bed, holding them captive for six hours. The pressure of being deported back to India with a $20,000 debt waiting at home drove one of the organizers to attempt suicide.

On May 9, 2007, 300 workers went on strike at Signal International to demand the release of their organizers. The company backed down, released them – and fired them. The company then ran an intimidation campaign on its employees, forcing the workers to quiet down and accept the conditions of labor trafficking.

On March 5 of this year 89 workers (members of the Indian Worker Congress/ Alliance of Guest workers for Dignity (housed in the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice) walked out of labor camps and packed a Pascagoula meeting hall for over four hours. They met with other previously fired Signal shipyard workers, activists, and advocates to discuss plans for the next day's action. Workers spoke Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam, which was then translated into English, Spanish and Portuguese. There was no need to translate the pain expressed as one of the workers stopped mid sentence- holding back the tears- as he explained that the American Dream had cost

far more than the twenty thousand dollars the recruiters charged but ultimately his home and his freedom. He realized that he couldn't go back home: he had sold his house and would be homeless.

The next morning, workers marched to the company gate, singing and singing "We shall overcome" in Hindi and chanting in Malyalam. At the perimeter fence workers held a short rally and left their hard hats to call attention to their continued abuses under the H2B visa program.

There was no need to translate the pain expressed as one of the workers mid sentence- holding back the tears- as he explained that the American Dream had cost far more than the twenty thousand dollars the recruiters charged but ultimately his home and his freedom.

Workers then came to New Orleans, where the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice held a festive event, celebrating the workers' newfound freedom in a community gymnasium. The event was attended by 200 people, including Mexican strawberry pickers, Brazilian shipyard workers without work in Mississippi, Day Laborers and community organizers working in New Orleans and translated into five languages.

The Day Laborer Theater Troupe performed a moving play about the Signal Workers and H2B program, followed by an emotional poem and powerful testimonials. The event concluded with everyone singing and dancing to Indian folk songs and a New Orleans brass band.

In the aftermath of Katrina and Rita gulf coast and people from around the world experienced the man made flood of false promises, greed, racism, and exploitation as contractors, business owners, and other opportunists sought to capitalize of some of the most economically disadvantaged, desperate and consequently most vulnerable citizens in the US and abroad. When they arrived, many workers found themselves in a much worse situation that they had been in.

But when the storm pulled into the region, it offered an opportunity to forge new alliances from these diverse communities into a common fight for human and civil rights.

The Indian Worker Congress has filed lawsuits against the labor recruiters and plans to ongoing actions to highlight human rights abuses and international labor trafficking in the U.S. and India.

CONTINUED from PAGE 3

fore call on the Federal Government and State and local authorities to immediately halt the demolitions of public housing in New Orleans." Similar calls have been made by Senators Clinton and Obama. Despite these calls, the demolitions continue.

The rebuilding has gone as many planned. Right after Katrina, one wealthy businessman told the Wall Street Journal, "Those who want to see this city rebuilt want to see it done in a completely different way: demographically, geographically and politically." Elected officials, from national officials like President Bush and HUD Secretary Jackson to local city council members, who are presumably sleeping in their own beds, apparently concur.

"The displacement of tens of thousands of people is now expected to be permanent"

Policies put in place so far do not appear overly concerned about the tens of thousands of working poor, the elderly and the disabled who are not able to come home.

The political implications of a dramatic reduction in poor and working mostly African American people in New Orleans are straightforward. The reduction directly helps Republicans who have fought for years to reduce the impact of the overwhelmingly Democratic New Orleans on state-wide politics in Louisiana.

In the jargon of political experts, Louisiana, before Katrina, was a "pink state." The state went for Clinton twice and then for Bush twice, with U.S. Senators from each party. The forced relocation of hundreds of thousands, mostly lower income and African-American, could alter the balance between the two major parties in Louisiana and the opportunities for black elected officials in New Orleans.

Given the political and governmental officials and policies in place now, one of the major casualties of Katrina will be the permanent displacement of tens of thousands of African Americans, the working poor, their children, the elderly, and the disabled.

Those who wanted a different New Orleans rebuilt probably see the concentrated displacement as a success. However, if the test of a society is how it treats its weakest and most vulnerable members, the aftermath of Katrina earns all of us a failing grade.

Bill Quigley is a professor of law at Loyola University in New Orleans where he runs a law clinic.



photo courtesy of Evan Casper-Futterman

Fenced Out at Duncan Plaza

Last December the State of Louisiana hastily decided that they needed to demolish their building north of Duncan Plaza, a public park across the street from New Orleans City Hall. Not surprisingly like so many other claims and projects in New Orleans, literally nothing has changed. Except the grass. There remains the same eight foot tall barb-wired fence encircling the perimeter of the park that existed in late December when the state declared it would be demolishing the building, but with the fence up, there was little reason to actually go through with anything.

The state's inaction hardly masks that their intent was to erect the fence in order to usher out its inhabitants.

Prior to the state's declaration, a strong and organized homeless encampment existed at Duncan Plaza. Nearly two hundred people slept the night in the park, many occupying bright red tents visible from the road. From July 2007, a particular subgroup of motivated people organized themselves into "Homeless Pride," which had vocal leadership who spoke to the city council and other aid agencies in the fall of 2007. The political group was gaining steam, and attendance at Duncan Plaza increased as folks felt more secure in a lighted and well populated area where a culture of respect and camaraderie was growing.

It was no secret that the mayor found the sight to be an eyesore for the city's tourism image. Consistently Mayor Ray Nagin has tried to find his own solutions to the increase of homeless in New Orleans, from 6,000 before the Federal Flood to 12,000, rather than asking national experts and the homeless themselves to see what care they needed and what solutions would work in the long term.

It seems unlikely that there was any intention of demolishing the building in late December without the proper demolition permits and contracts in the works. It most decidedly could have been, and this is speculation, a safe political favor asked by the mayor of the state to funnel homeless folks back under the Claiborne bridge just blocks away and break up the difficult gains of organizing the homeless that Homeless Pride had succeeded in accomplishing over the past six months.

Now, in mid-April, the fence is still standing, the building is still standing and the hot political debate no longer is the homeless issue. Signs on the ground behind the metal lattice, read "Duncan Plaza closed due to demolition." However, in defiance, someone managed to jump the fence and crossed out the words "due" and "demolition," and added a phrase in thick sharpie to remake the sign, to bend it toward truth as they saw it: "Duncan Plaza closed to keep ignoring the homeless."

The resistance will live on. The question is, what form will it take?

Public Housing Protestors from City Council "Riot" Convicted

By Matt Olson

NEW ORLEANS, March 20—Six of the protestors arrested at the public housing demonstration outside of city council on December 20, 2007 were convicted of various charges, including disturbing the peace, on Wednesday morning in Orleans Parish Criminal Court. Judge Paul Sens sentenced each protestor to community service, though the conviction, if upheld after appeal, will appear as a misdemeanor on their record. The charges of two other protestors were dismissed.

Of the six people convicted, five were black and one was a white woman who insisted on offering testimony that incriminated herself. The convicted defendants—Robert Horton, Krystal Muhammed, Darrel "Sess 4-5" Warren, Khalil Shahyd, Mandisa Moore and Lisa Guido – and their attorney Judson Mitchell are considering an appeal, which they have thirty days to file.

Judge Sens convicted Moore, Guido and Shahyd of disturbing the peace while Horton and Warren were, in addition, convicted of resisting arrest. Sens sentenced all five to forty hours of community service. Muhammed received a sentence of a $200 fine and eighty hours of community service because she was convicted of simple battery for allegedly spitting on a photographer. She was also the only defendant with an arresting officer who attended the trial. The photographer did not testify.



NOPD lock the gates to City Council on December 20.

Several of those arrested on December 20 were not present, as they requested or received a different date. Malcolm Suber, Demetrius "Sino" Warren and Jay Arena are scheduled to appear in court later in April.

On Tuesday night, Robert "Kool Black" Horton, a director of Critical Resistance-New Orleans, had made up his mind that he wasn't going to attend court. He had been informed by lawyer allies that his charge was likely to be dismissed in what was thought to be a pre-trial hearing. Subsequently, his attorney had not met with him to prepare a strategy and testimony on his case.

However, in the early morning, Horton received a call that an attachment for his arrest would be put out if he did not attend the hearing.

In the courtroom, Horton immediately noticed the amount of state's witnesses present, though he did not see his arresting officer.

While the defendants attorney argued for a continuance, Judge Sens denied the request and proceeded with a trial.

In Horton's case, the state's witnesses confused him with another defendant who was in a different location within the City Council chambers. "They thought I was Sino," Horton said, referring to Demetrius Warren. Due to this lie proven by videotape of the event, Horton's testimony and the use of extreme force (he was tasered), he may have the best chance for a successful appeal.

Four law enforcement officials were called to testify as was Bill Quigley, human rights lawyer and Professor at Loyola University. Quigley handled several of the lawsuits filed to stop the demolition of public housing in New Orleans by the Department of Housing of Urban Development. He was also present at City Council on December 20.

Defendants could also take the stand, waiving their Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination. Most of the defendants chose to testify.

Horton noted that his peers did well on the witness stand despite the lack of preparation. "Sess really laid it out in terms of what happened," Horton said.

When the verdict came down, the defendants were shocked. But when "community service" was the sentence, many were confused as to why the judge would convict on limited evidence and then only for a slap on the wrist.

"I'm not gonna to wear that orange out on a bridge," Horton said of his reaction at the time, momentarily joking. "Give me my ten days now."

However, the judge allowed the defendants to submit an organization to work with for their community service and they chose a community-based criminal reform organization.

A Brief History of Formaldehyde in FEMA Trailers

By Matt Robinson

Earlier this year, FEMA and the Centers for Disease Control validated what had been known for some time: FEMA-issued trailers given to Gulf Coast evacuees after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita pose a serious health risk to occupants, particularly the very young, the old, and people with asthma, due to excessively high levels of formaldehyde fumes.

The confirmation came on the heels of a CDC study of the units that found dangerous amounts of formaldehyde in many travel trailers and mobile homes. The CDC study follows by one year another study carried out by FEMA and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) which also found high levels of the fumes in trailers, but this first study came under fire from scientists who criticized its methodology and blasted its results. As a result, a second round of tests was ordered.


Matt Robinson

Congressional ire has been piqued by FEMA over the agency's handling of the formaldehyde issue. Congressman Henry Waxman accused the agency of "premeditated ignorance" of the issue after emails and memos surfaced last summer that demonstrated an attempt by FEMA to disown the problem and downplay the risks faced by trailer occupants. Recently, the CDC was accused by two Democratic Senators of "complicity" in FEMA's attempts to manipulate information from an earlier round of tests which revealed as early as February 2007 that the trailers had unsafe levels of the chemical.

Now that the hazardous levels of the fumes have been verified, some action is being taken. Trailers that remain in use will be reclaimed by FEMA, and occupants will have to find other, safer housing. According to FEMA, less than 40,000 units remain occupied in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

But even as far from hurricane states as Arizona, the travel trailers have generated controversy. They are suspected to be involved in health problems experienced by occupants of roughly 100 travel trailers bought by copper company Phelps Dodge to house miners during the current copper boom. Strip mines that were long closed down are now active again, in response to high copper prices pushed up by an industrial expansion in Asia, but small towns near the mines in southeast Arizona are struggling to provide housing for the influx of miners and their families. Phelps Dodge has provided trailers rent-free for miners, but families have complained of the same types of ailments that have sickened Gulf Coast evacuees living in the shelters.

In hindsight, the FEMA could have – and should have – taken action two years ago, when agency field staff in Louisiana and Mississippi initially learned of the potential problem and immediately sought to conduct formaldehyde testing on units. Despite field agents taking an admirable lead on the issue, FEMA lawyers and bureaucrats halted their efforts, and commanded them to leave it alone. For over the past two years, storm-affected Gulf Coast residents have endured foot-dragging and delays from the emergency response agency, on top of the possibly cancerous fumes emanating from their temporary shelters.

How did these trailers become so contaminated? Recreational vehicles and travel trailers are sold by the tens of thousands every year, and although some amount formaldehyde is present in just about every one of them, few complaints have surfaced from RV consumers. In the 1980s, formaldehyde-related health problems with mobile home and RV consumers led to investigations which found high levels of the fumes, but manufacturers since then generally used lower-emitting wood products

in their units.

But the trailers given out by FEMA are a different matter. Although thousands of trailers were bought by FEMA from existing dealer inventories across the country in late 2005, the available stock was insufficient to provide for the acute housing need caused by the hurricanes. FEMA contracted with over a dozen travel trailer manufacturers to produce tens of thousands more units. This sudden influx of trailer orders overwhelmed manufacturers, who quickly ramped up production, reportedly opening 24-hour assembly lines with workers pulling 12-hour shifts.

But such accelerated production outstripped American supplies of vital construction materials, including pressed-wood, particle board, and other processed hardwood products. Chinese hardwood manufacturers in particular have undercut the US domestic wood industry in recent years, and the few American firms still producing wood simply could not keep up with the demands of the RV industry.

Accordingly, US manufacturers sought supplies elsewhere. African and Chinese hardwood products were imported and shipped to travel trailer manufacturers throughout the mid-west, and this wood went into the construction of FEMA's emergency housing units.

China admittedly has a problem with the quality of its exports. Recent scandals include Chinese-manufactured toys with lead paint and other unsafe chemicals in them and dog food made with plastics. Australia last year condemned and sent back to China a shipment of blankets that were laced with high levels of formaldehyde, and industry representatives have conceded that Chinese hardwood contains problematic levels of the substance.

When the tainted wood arrived at travel trailer factories, assembly workers were among the first to feel what later thousands of FEMA trailer occupants would endure: headaches, bloody noses, upper respiratory complications, and burning eyes.

> Emails and memos surfaced last summer that demonstrated an attempt by FEMA to disown the problem and downplay the risks faced by trailer occupants.

These symptoms related to exposure to dangerously high levels of formaldehyde fumes. Although several standards regarding workplace exposure to the chemical exist, there is no national regulation covering safe levels of formaldehyde for workers, and until recently, no standard for formaldehyde levels in manufactured housing such as travel trailers and campers. Factory workers and trailer occupants complained, but few paid attention to their grievances.

The first agency to test units for the chemical was the Mississippi Sierra Club. Their study of occupied trailers revealed unsafe amounts of the fumes. The Sierra Club sounded an alarm, and called for further testing. Since then, FEMA, the CDC, individual trailer occupants, and lawyers for class-action plaintiffs have conducted many more tests of the formaldehyde in the units. All have routinely found unsafe levels of the industrial chemical. In Louisiana alone, at least half a dozen lawsuits concerning formaldehyde are pending. The final word on these and other cases may not be heard for some time.

FEMA has declared that all travel trailer occupants will be moved from their possibly dangerous shelters before the heat of the Gulf Coast summer arrives. It will be a monumental task, given the state of housing in the storm-affected region, and it comes too late to save thousands of occupants from chronic health conditions that they have endured in contaminated trailers since Katrina and Rita forced them from their homes. But at long last, the debacle of formaldehyde in FEMA trailers may be nearing an end.



Matt Robinson

DEACTIVATED FEMA TRAILERS WAITING TO BE PICKED UP IN THE 9TH WARD.

INDYMEDIA NEWSWIRE

NATIONAL

ICE Raids on Shipleys Bakery

HOUSTON, April 16—Faith and community leaders gather in front of the Houston federal building to denounce the workplace raid at Shipley Do-nuts that resulted in 20 workers' detention and likely removal from their homes and families.

There is conjecture by some activists that this raid may be related to the mid-March settlement of sexual harassment, racial threats and violations of labor law brought against Shipleys management by Shipleys workers. This lawsuit, which The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission looked into and gave the workers the right to sue, alleged that management called workers "wetbacks" threatened to deport them, did not pay workers for working overtime, and demanded payment from workers who wanted



to leave work for vacation or to visit a doctor when hurt on the job.

houston.indymedia.org

Three NYPD Detectives Acquitted on All Counts in Bell Shooting

NEW YORK CITY, April 25—Following yesterday morning's announcement of Judge Cooperman's "not guilty on all counts" acquittal verdict of 3 of the 5 NYPD officers involved in the murder of Sean Bell,

NATIONAL ***continued in gray columns***

NEW ORLEANS

Frederick Douglass HS in Jeopardy

April 29—Louisiana's Recovery School District, whose master facilities plan has been delayed until June, announced that Frederick Douglass High School, the only high school in either the Upper or Lower 9th Ward, will be phased out. Douglass, a historic public works building with beautiful windows and sturdy structure, is one of the last community-based schools in a New Orleans education landscaped that favors limited enrollment Charter Schools and a RSD that favors transported students far from home.

The RSD, run by education czar Paul Vallas, plans to phase out Douglass by moving the incoming Ninth Grade into a trailer-based school in the Lower 9th Ward focused on public safety, which it will build into a full school with each new class. Despite lip-service to include community input, the RSD has only answered questions and not taken the concerns and desires of the Douglass community seriously, advocates say.

The Frederick Douglass Community Coalition, an advocacy group for the neighborhood created in late 2001, is organizing against the shutdown of the school. There are several strong arguments to save and renew Douglass as a center of education for students and the community, including that students need classrooms in buildings not trailers, community-based schools provide stability and opportunities of lasting interaction with surrounding neighborhoods, and that renovation will cost less than constructing a completely new school.

The RSD's main criticism of Douglass is that it only teaches about 350 students and has double the capacity. Shockingly, ninth graders who were not retaking that year were deliberately denied from attending Douglass, advocates said, which perhaps hinted RSD's attempts to phase out the school. One practical solution offered by a Douglass teacher would be to return the students now at trailer-based Carver High School—which split the area's student population when it opened this school year—back

NEW ORLEANS ***continued in white columns***

to Douglass.

Concerned New Orleanians, parents and students meet with Paul Vallas on May 6 at 6pm inside Frederick Douglass High School.

5th Int'l Human Rights Film Fest: Connecting Local and Global Struggles

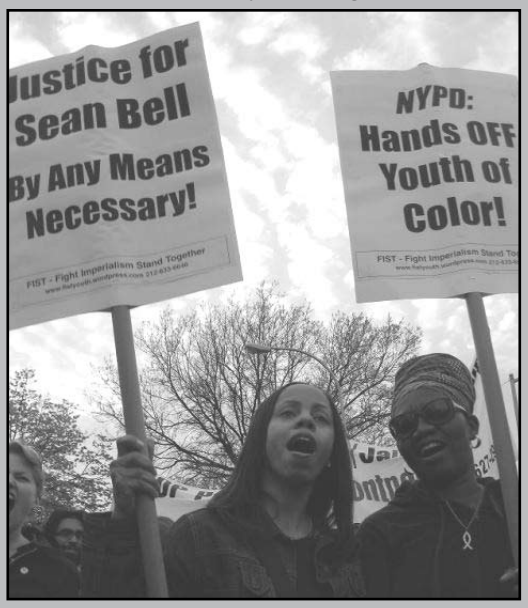
April 20—The final day of the New Orleans International Human Rights Film Festival timely local issues surrounding NAFTA, the legacy and continuation of racism and the prison-industrial complex. After 11 days and dozens of feature and short films, the "Jena 6" feature film by Big Noise Tactical Films, a collective of filmmakers, projected to giant applause. Four parents of the six young black men who were originally charged with attempted murder in Jena, Louisiana came to the front of the room as a panel to describe their sons' current situation and to answer questions. An audience member asked whether the racism exercised by the white people in power was a surprise: "There's been so much going on in that little town all these years that it wasn't a surprise, but they had tried to go to far this time," one father answered. "And if we hadn't stood up for our kids, they'd be in Angola [State Prison] right now."

The Jena 6 panel and the NAFTA workshop at noon earlier in the day epitomized the importance of the festival as a place for education, discussion and action. "We're less of an arts event and more an organizing event," emphasized Jordan Flaherty, festival director. "We're a tool, a resource for social justice organizing in this city. We're founded and organized by activists and by grassroots organizations that fight on these issues. We're here to struggle on these issues, to link local and international issues, to set the framing on the debate of these issues to say this is not about one person's struggle, this is about a struggle internationally. They're demolishing public housing in New Orleans and they're demolishing housing in Palestine. We're fighting for the right of return to New Orleans, we're fighting for the right of return to Palestine. We want to seize the media in New Orleans, they seized the media in Oaxaca. It is a local aspect of an international struggle. We bring these struggles together at the International Film Festival."

American Friends Service Committee Opens New Orleans Office

April 14—AFSC had a Open House for their first office in New Orleans, at 1137 Baronne Street, that will serve their Gulf Coast Program to "Interrupt the School to Prison Pipeline." Several hundreds gathered in Queens to express their outrage. Disgusted by the trial process (determined by 1 judge rather than a jury), and the unjust outcome, the Peoples Justice rally began at 5:30pm by the Queens DA's office, with family members speaking of having lost loved ones to police brutality, and others speaking of personal experiences being victimized by law enforcement violence.

In addition to justice for Sean Bell and other specific cases, Peoples Justice is calling for an end to racist & militarized policing of our communities; the creation of a permanent independent prosecutor for all cases of police brutality in NYC; and increased efforts for community control of our safety through creation of community Cop Watch patrols and Know Your Rights work.



indypendent.org

International Women's Day

HOUSTON, March 8—:In celebration of International Women's Day, 2008 female artists are working collectively to create an event that promotes and supports a female artistic movement. The Houston, Texaevent took place in Houston, Texas on March 8th, 2008 at Willow Street Pump Station.

The first IWD was observed on 28 February 1909 in the United States following a declaration by the Socialist Party of America. Among other relevant historic events, it commemorates the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire (New York, 1911), where over 140 women lost their lives. The idea of having an international women's day was first put forward at the turn of the 20th century amid rapid world industrialization and economic expansion that led to protests over working conditions.

houston.indymedia.org

Uniting Against Gentrification in Wynwood Neighborhood of Miami

MIAMI, Feb. 9— One hundred residents of Miami's embattled neighborhood of Wynwood met for the meeting to develop a community platform against gentrification. Called the Take Back Wynwood Town Hall, this historic gathering of residents from this Latino working class enclave in the heart of Miami's shifting inner city exposed deep rooted frustrations and anger at the displacement of community combined with an energized spirit to unite and fight gentrification in all its forms.

Inspired by the testimony from Latino residents, Clarence Mimms from the grassroots organization Low-Income Families Fighting Together spoke during the open mic section of the meeting, "Before I came here today I thought that Latino people were just taking away Black jobs. Now I understand that the bosses are exploiting Latinos for low-pay. Now I know that we have to fight together in order to win justice."

miami,indymedia.org

Students and Workers Block Road to Protest Poverty Wages

SANTA CRUZ, Feb. 28—UC Santa Cruz workers represented by the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299, and backed by students, demonstrated for justice, dignity and a fair working contract. Over 350 people took part in the largest demonstration of the school year in support of UCSC's most underpaid workers. Instead of making demands outside the Chancellor's office, workers and students got UCSC's attention by lining McLaughlin Drive and twice shutting down Hagar Drive. Students and workers felt empowered by seeing how easily they can bring UCSC to a halt.

Workers are concerned that UC is replacing certain full-time career jobs with un-benefited per diem positions or hiring temporary workers, like registry or travelers, who have little experience working at UC. AFSCME Local 3299 members believe: contracted jobs create a second class of workers at UC, usually with lower wages and benefits; UC's use of sub-contracted, student, temp, registry workers hurts the ability of all UC workers to provide the best students services; and that UC has been taking advantage of working students by hiring them to do the same work as AFSCME Local 3299 members but for less pay and fewer benefits.

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Camp Out at City Hall

SEATTLE, March 14—The Camp Out at Seattle City Hall challenged the city's callous practice of demolishing homeless people's encampments and throwing away their property. Until recently, camps were only removed if there were complaints from neighbors. New Orleans-based organizations that already work on these issues were invited to speak on their initiatives, including Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children. AFSC's initiatives focus on lowering the policing of schools, thereby the number of suspensions, as well as an anti-military recruitment campaign. For more info visit www.afsc.org/neworleans or call 504-565-3599.

V-Day to the Tenth

April 12—The Superdome became "Superlove" for the Tenth Anniversary of V-Day, an extraordinary celebration of women created by Eve Engsler the author of the world famous "Vagina Monologues." Over the course of two days, women were treated to free massages, pedicure, manicures and sexual health and support information. On the final night, a special production of the "Vagina Monologues" starred celebrities and local musicians, as well as a moving new monologue about a New Orleans woman who is the bedrock of her neighborhood.

New Orleans Chapter of National Lawyers Guild Starts Back Up

April 4—In the first official meeting of the chapter in years, the National Lawyers Guild of New Orleans reconnected with lawyers, legal assistants, law students and other legal workers who want to become active or have a support group for their legal activism. The aim of the National Lawyers Guild, founded in 1937 and the first racially integrated bar association, is to bring together all those who recognize the importance of safeguarding and extending the rights of workers, women, farmers, people with disabilities and people of color, upon whom the welfare of the entire nation depends.

To become involved, contact: loyolanlg@gmail.com or nikkithanos@gmail.com, 504-616-1888.

400 Line Up to Expunge Records

March 29—In an effort to combat de facto discriminatory practices based on background checks for jobs, housing, and loans, Safe Streets/Strong Communities, Critical Resistance New Orleans and the Orleans Public Defenders organized a day-long event where lawyers helped

more than four hundred people start the expungement process to clear their record of any arrests and potentially certain types of convictions from Orleans Parish. Though the District Attorney, police and select professions (hospital employers, etc.) can still view a person's complete criminal background, the expungement makes the record inaccessible to bankers, landlords and employers. Many people simply had one or more arrests from traffic-based citations or municipal offenses, which accounted for 40,000 out of 80,000 arrests in New Orleans last year. The day was ever present with first-hand accounts of how an arrest, where a fee would have sufficed, prevented someone from getting a living wage job or mortgage.

VOICES OF THE INNOCENT

March 9—This is the story of four men who spent time on death row and who, after protesting their innocence and making legal injunctions and appeals to that end, were exonerated. All four discuss the process of being arrested, sentenced by a jury often not of their peers, the psychology of time in jail and on death row and having to adjust back to "the outside" for a crime they never committed. Several missed their children growing up, one now called "brother" by his son and daughter.

Elevated on a stage theater inside the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts school, each person sat on a stool under bright lighting and read from a pre-typed manuscript on a stand.

The Innocence Project sponsored the event due to its integral part it has played in all four men's lives as a non-profit legal assistance initiative to support prisoners who have flawed cases and trials, and who have always maintained their innocence.

Many people acknowledged that the event was under-attended--only one hundred people--considering the gravity of these revelations about New Orleans and Louisiana's criminal justice system in the recent past and the present.



RYAN WILLIAMS WAS ONE OF FOUR MEN WHO PUT ON A PLAY ABOUT THEIR REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES OF BEING INNOCENT AND ON DEATH ROW IN LOUISIANA.



seattle.indymedia.org

PROTEST AT SEATTLE CITY HALL FOR HOMELESS RIGHTS

But since the summer, the city has been aggressively shutting down sites before receiving a citizen complaint. The property destroyed at these camps is critical for survival outdoors in cold weather. It includes tents, sleeping bags, and cooking equipment.

The One Night Count of the Homeless in King County, showed a 15 percent increase countywide in street homeless over last year. In 2008, there is an estimated 8,600 individuals who are homeless. So far, the city's solutions to homelessness has ranged from indifference to quick fixes. A proposed ordinance would make it illegal to sleep outdoors. But removing a homeless camp or arresting a homeless person does not solve homelessness. It just criminalizes poverty.

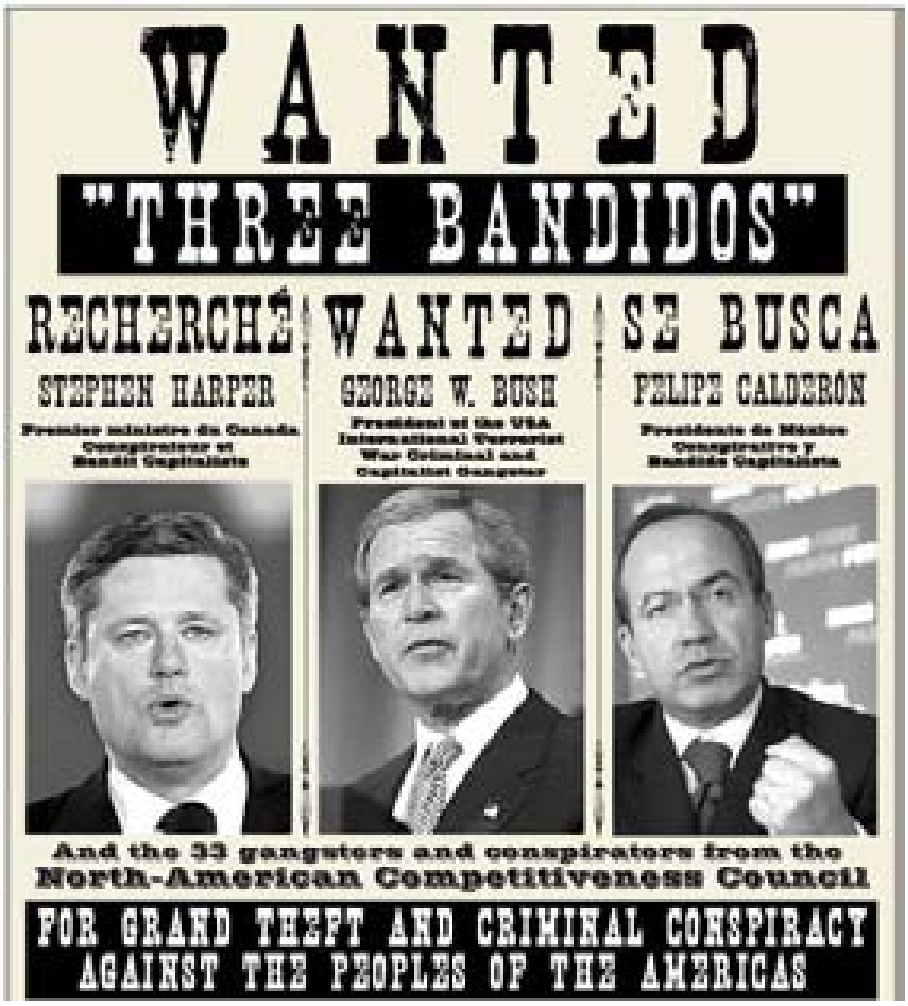
The Rev. Rich Lang and ten other faith community leaders served hot food. Many were moved by Lang's speech, which addressed homelessless in a spiritual and a societal context. Lang has been an active advocate for social justice. In a recent sermon, he told his congregation:

"The patterns behind homelessness are many. The mentally ill are too much for their families to handle, but politicians have other priorities for our tax dollars, so the mentally ill live on our streets. We can get all 'ga-ga patriotic' over our troops but after they've served their purpose, 'we the people' and our politicians, betray their sacrifice, look away from their wounds, pretend we bear no responsibility. We conspire to live in a culture that defines homeland security as having more to do with an obsessive compulsion to fortify and protect ourselves, rather than to promote the common good....

"At the root of homelessness is the reality that human beings are being turned into spirit-less lumps of clay, they have been cut off from society, their hope of a future has been high-jacked by a politics that determines that some are more worthy than others, their bones are dried up because of neglect, avoidance, and segregation. No longer fully welcomed and embraced within society, they are tossed aside into a field, into a valley where no one else ever goes."

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SECURITY & PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP (SPP) SUMMIT NEW ORLEANS 2008



poster courtesy of quebec.indymedia.org

Often referred to as a non-binding version of North American Free Trade Agreement meetings, the summit between President George Bush of the United States of America, President Felipe Calderon of Mexico and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada in New Orleans on **April 21** and **22** brought impacted activists, organizers, and workers from across North America to resist privatization and militarization of our communities and our resources.

New Orleanian organizers, who continue to be burdened by post-Federal Flood issues, rallied over the previous three weeks to assemble a "People's Summit" with open attendance in response to the SPP Summit's behind closed doors meeting. The People's Summit focused on cultural resistance, education and networking rather than on protests or direct confrontation.

The following excerpts range from pointed opinions and essays to interviews and critiques.

DECLARATION
AGAINST THE SPP

[The following Declaration was submitted by Kali Akuno, an organizer of the New Orleans Reconstruction Movement, for support to the Second Continental Conference Against Free Trade & Privatizations, held in Mexico City on April 4-6, 2008.]

We, the participants of the Second Continental Conference Against Free Trade and Privatizations, stand opposed to the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) Conference of the Americas being convened by U.S. President George W. Bush in New Orleans, Louisiana, on April 21-22, 2008.

This meeting is a heinous crime against the peoples of North America, but particularly against the dispossessed and displaced peoples of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Calling this meeting in New Orleans, which remains largely unoccupied more than 30 months after Hurricane Katrina and where more than half of its historic African American majority remains displaced, only highlights the true intentions of this undemocratic initiative and the neo-liberal agenda it seeks to propagate.

In the case of New Orleans, this neo-liberal agenda advances the ethnic cleansing of the cities African American population as a means to eliminate a strategic base of "Black Power" resistant to the program of privatizations and retrenchments needed to maximize profits for transnational corporations.

In the case of North America as a whole, the SPP seeks to eliminate the national sovereignty of Mexico and Canada in the name of U.S. national security in order to plunder their natural resources (oil, gas, water, etc.) for U.S. consumption and the profit maximization of transnational corporations.

We, the participants of the Second Continental Conference Against Free Trade and Privatizations, stand in active solidarity with the People's Summit being organized by the democratic forces of resistance in New Orleans and throughout North America to counter the neo-liberal program of state privatization and working class dispossession being advanced by treaties like the SPP, NAFTA, CAFTA, and other Free Trade Agreements.

We, participants of the Second Continental Conference Against Free Trade and Privatizations support the conclusions of the International Tribunal on Katrina, held in New Orleans in August 2007. We demand the Right of Return for all displaced people from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, the recognition of IDP status for displaced people, reparations for all those displaced, and a massive publicly Reconstruction program, beginning with the restoration of all public housing for the residents of New Orleans.

We, the participants of the Second Continental Conference Against Free Trade and Privatizations, call for the unity of the peoples of the Americas for self-determination, national sovereignty, and human rights against reactionary privatizations, free trade agreements, and corporate-driven dictatorships. The peoples united will never be defeated!

Day Laborers "Deport" Bush

On the day before the SPP, the Congress of Day Laborers, a member-based group largely comprised of workers that moved here from Central and South America after the Federal Flood, put on a street theater performance that imagined the "deportation" of Bush. The play began by recounting the true stories of how many laborers ended up in the United States. Their crops turned worthless with American goods flooding the Mexican market with NAFTA. They crossed the border with promises of well-paying jobs. In the process, some were arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and deported while others couldn't make the strenuous journey on foot. Once in the United States, workers were not protected from wage theft or provided healthcare in dangerous occupations.



VIVA NOLA! by NOLA RISING

What does "NAFTA-gate" mean for social movements?

By Blair Redlin

March 13—On March 5, the day after the Ohio Democratic primary in which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was such a vote determining issue, activists, legislators and academics from Mexico, the U.S. and Canada gathered at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington D.C. to take a critical look at NAFTA and the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) and what might be done about them.

The importance of the political moment was not lost on the participants. It isn't only in Ohio that NAFTA is generating intense opposition.

In Mexico, antipathy to NAFTA is widespread. On January 31 of this year, an estimated 200,000 farmers from all over Mexico descended on Mexico City for a major protest against NAFTA and its recent requirement for removal of corn tariffs.

In the United States, there is a growing awareness that NAFTA has contributed to the destruction of one in four U.S. manufacturing jobs and prompted a decline in real wages. The promise by both Democrat frontrunners to open up and renegotiate NAFTA is a reflection of growing public concern.

Here in Canada, the Harper government found itself facing strong political heat for its interference in the U.S. primaries on the NAFTA issue in a scandal now dubbed "NAFTA-gate."

But that heat should be situated in the context of the large protests in Canada against the SPP Leaders Summit in Montebello just last August and the consistent community organizing in this country against the alphabet soup of investor rights agreements and proposals like the now stalled FTAA (remember Quebec City?) the MAI, the WTO and the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) between Alberta and B.C.

Fourteen years after the signing of the NAFTA in 1994 and twenty years after the signing of the Canada/U.S. Free Trade Agreement in 1988, corporate trade agreements remain as controversial as ever. Citizen groups continue to work hard to undo their damage.

The meeting in Washington D.C. was part of that work. Participants heard about the strong link between the economic problems that NAFTA has caused in Mexico, the migration and immigration challenges facing the U.S. and the problematic foreign guest worker program in Canada.

Mexican Congressional Deputy Victor Quintana from the State of Chihuahua noted that since 1994, one quarter of the rural population of Mexico and 2 million jobs have left the countryside. This has sharply accelerated migration to the U.S. Quintana said that in the 1970s, the average annual migration to the U.S. from Mexico was only 29,000 people, whereas in 2006, 455,000 Mexicans moved north.

In Canada, increasing numbers of vulnerable temporary workers are being brought to our country through a guest worker program that encourages low wages, poor working conditions and limited worker rights.

New Democrat Member of Parliament Peter Julian talked about the huge increase in income inequality in Canada since the signing of the first Canada/U.S. Free Trade Agreement. While income is up for the wealthiest 20 percent of Canadians (who now take half of all income) it has dropped for everyone else. Those earning between $40,000 and $60,000 per year have lost the equivalent of a week's worth of wages since 1989 and those earning between $20,000 and $40,000 have lost two weeks.

Legislators from all three countries issued a joint news release in Washington announcing the creation of a Task Force on Renegotiation of NAFTA. They intend to introduce similar legislation on NAFTA in all three parliaments, as well as motions to stop the SPP.

But Pierre-Yves Serinet of the Quebec RQIC network against hemispheric integration (Réseau Québcois sur l'Intégration Continentale) noted that NAFTA has actually been revised several times since it was first signed. The national governments use administrative mechanisms to quietly amend NAFTA on issues like rules of origin, with little public notice. In light of this, it's more than a little hypocritical for the Harper government to complain about Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama promising to open up the deal.

Indeed, the current discussion of renegotiation presents a challenge for social movements, many of which prefer abrogation. What kind of renegotiation will make a meaningful difference if done in the context of secretive SPP processes and corporate influence on governments? At a minimum, we will need to see the elimination of NAFTA's Chapter 11, which allows corporations to sue governments for their public policies. Some at the Washington meetings argued that the current moment offers social movements a unique opportunity to articulate a people centred vision for a better, more democratic North America.

One thing the discourse on renegotiation definitely offers is an opportunity to organize, particularly given

that the next SPP Leaders Summit will be held in New Orleans, April 21 and 22. So a strategy session was held March 6 at Georgetown University, led by the Alliance for Responsible Trade of the U.S. along with the networks from Quebec, Canada and Mexico that are part of the Hemispheric Social Alliance.

Given the secretive panels of corporate CEOs that are driving it, the SPP is fundamentally about the privatization of public policy. The irony of holding the next SPP Summit in New Orleans is obvious. New Orleans was referred to as "a laboratory of the SPP," given the militarization, privatization, gentrification, lack of democracy and demolitions of public housing that the people of New Orleans have suffered since Hurricane Katrina.

The strategy session heard from representatives of the Grassroots Global Justice coalition in New Orleans, who explained that the situation remains desperate for many residents of that city. The social movements in New Orleans are proposing that a popular summit be organized in New Orleans to help educate people both about the SPP as well as the impact of Bush administration policies on the people of the Gulf Coast.

While awareness and concern about the SPP is high in both Canada and Mexico, there is less awareness of it in the U.S. To the extent there is knowledge of it in the U.S., it often comes from right-wing complaints about the so-called "North American Union."

The New Orleans Summit in April offers an excellent opportunity to better inform citizens of all three countries about the ultimate "public/private partnership" that is the SPP. As well, given the current political moment of controversy about NAFTA in all three countries, this is a crucial chance to strengthen social movements by slowing down the SPP and demanding transparency around its deliberations.

Blair Redlin is a researcher and project manager for the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

"We Wanted to Set the Table": an interview with Kimberly Richards

When we were contacted about the Three Amigos, as they call themselves, coming to New Orleans, Monique [Harden of Advocates of Environmental Human Rights] and I had gone through organizing the New Orleans delegation for the U.S. Social Forum and I think that afforded us some benefits: of one, what it means to work together as two black women and to understand where each other is coming from and be on the ground having a sense—not that we know everything—but just having a sense as to what our communities have been through here in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast the past few months. And the number of demonstrations that we've had, and what it has and has not resulted in and how we have either gotten stronger from it or not.

So one of the things that the U.S. Social Forum did for us was to give us an opportunity to see the benefit of coming together for collective action to gain more information about the work we do and how we can be more effective in that work.

Now, we weren't poo-pooing anybody's decision to demonstrate, but we believe both because of that experience at the Social Forum in June, but also I think because of the knocks and the blows and the bumps we've taken in the general work that we do. Recognizing that there are groups that come in from out of town, wherever the Three Amigos go, and they have their agenda, they have their focus, and they have their goals and objectives. For me, I was most concerned that people from the outside were coming into our community, determining an agenda that our community was not in alignment with.

And as gatekeepers in the community with the work that we've done, we want to learn more about the relationship between the historic North American Free Trade Agreement to the current one. We want to be able to dialogue with folks that may have that expertise, but for them to also hear our expertise.

When you come in somebody's house, you sit at their table. You don't bring a table with you. And you don't bring chairs with you. Whatever chairs they have, that's where you sit. We wanted to set a table that people could sit at and that we could all have a dialogue and grow and and build and learn from. I just feel like this kind of People's Summit could afford that. We felt that any other kind of domination from external forces is another way NAFTA operates. So we don't want to look like them, or allow that to happen through the domination of other folks coming in and saying this is how it's gonna be and this is how y'all gonna act, this how we gonna do this, 'cause that's NAFTA on a community level. And that's what we don't need."

Dr. Kimberly Richards, facilitator and organizer for the People's Summit & trainer with The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, a national anti-racist education organization.

MAYABA LIEBENTHAL,
a Critical Resistance New Orleans organizer,
speaks about the Security and Prosperity Partnership at the New Orleans International Human Rights Film Festival Workshop concerning NAFTA:

The SPP started in March of 2005 in secret and without any kind of Congressional oversight. It's not a treaty and will never go before legislators, but it relies exclusively on executive authority. Not only does that make it invisible, which is one of the reasons why they meet in secrecy, behind massive military force. This is a response to an increase in competition for oil and gas reserves as well as a worsening trade balance in China. They want to have increased worker programs to ensure cheap labor. They want to make sure they have an endless supply and they want to make sure they profit. For us it's important to think about how these arrangements undermine community when we're trying to talk about resistance because, ultimately, it's people and communities who are going to make that change happen. The basic functions of undermining community are the force migration of people through economic displacement. The guest worker programs are just state legalized human trafficking. You see prisons being used within the United States to exploit labor and uproot people from their communities. And also the forced migration in New Orleans especially, is the internal displacement. The setup of the privatization and militarization here has led to a population that cannot return home. There are 150,000 that we know of at this place and time. When it comes to forced migration it's interesting to hear that in rural parts of Mexico it's men who have disappeared, where in New Orleans we see that women aren't able to come back. We've seen an 85 percent drop in woman head of households, that's particularly black women. With the lack of housing, with the lack of healthcare, the lack of schools, people who are caretakers not just as mothers, but those who take care of other family members, are then put in situations where you cannot return to this place. So that's another form of breaking community and population control.

They have to do massive repression to make sure that this happens. One of the things that we can talk about in terms of repression and seeing how locally here in New Orleans, the way that the higher powers are operating is being mimicked if not directed by the way the SPP is functioning: done in secret, not having any sort of people's voice in the process. You can see what happened to people here in New Orleans who were fighting for public housing. They kicked people out. They maced, tased everybody. And for what? So they could privatize mass land space 'cause this is a mass land grab that relates back to the super corridors [for the Interstate 69 Super Highway]. How are you going to have six lanes of traffic, how are you going to have all of this unless you take a lot of land? I think there's 600,000 acres at stake in Texas. Imagine a community that has an interstate put through it like the Treme [neighborhood in New Orleans]. You see how that interstate broke up that community. This is just massive scale. So you cities instead of just one small neighborhood. So these unfair policies that are disintegrating our communities cannot move forward without repression. Here we're seeing militarization of police forces. For New Orleans, we're the most blatant example, but throughout the United States militarization is occurring in police forces in terms of weapons they use, the strategies that they use and how they go after people. So what that does, is it gets us used to having military presence in our streets. To the point where they now patrol and we don't really notice. They have squad cars that look like real squad cars, 'cause you know, those hummers, they were intimidating. And had bad public reaction, so you give them smaller cars.

Another direct effect of the militarization is that people who have criminal records can no longer get jobs working on the docks due to these new standards they have with the Transportation Security Administration. Basically they're saying that if you have a criminal record you can't work on the docks 'cause it would make it unsafe. Now contractors themselves would tell you we don't need Boy Scouts—or Girl Scouts—to work on the docks. So what is this arrangement really for? You're gonna lock more people out, you're gonna make sure people have to go through underground economies to make a living or lock them away and exploit their labor in the rebuilding or clean up of the city.

People's Summit Report Back

By O. Katz

NEW ORLEANS, APRIL 29—After the second sun burnt day of the gulf coast's People's Summit, we here in New Orleans are lost in thought, like it will be months before President Bush comes to town, when in fact he is here now enjoying the city, it's famous music and finest dining, comforted by air conditioning and motorcades. The city met the introductory effects of the new Security & Prosperity Partnership: with the Mississippi river bridge's on and off ramps blocked, Interstate-10 was made into an express highway, directing main flows of traffic and people conveniently out of the president's way, inconveniencing everyone else from having access to the city. The Mississippi river ferry shuttled internally displaced traffic across the water, patrolled through the day by coast guard boats fully armed and ready to fire mounted machine guns in full show of force and what Bush intends to mean by 'security,' we on the docks agreed was menacing and intimidating.

The historic, nation-altering meeting taking place between the leaders of the "free world" is being met with little, hardly any, noticeable resistance. Due at least in part to the crippled condition of New Orleans, where three years after the hurricanes people continue to face daily struggles to survive storms of poverty; with no surplus resources, time, or active community members to lend to what would likely be, in any other city in the hemisphere, a historic People's protest to the executive meeting.

Tens of thousands of New Orleanians remain displaced internally within the city and across the US. A housing crisis within the city makes battling city council, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) a stressful and demanding job for many who manage to returned.

Homelessness is compounded by a lack of job opportunities and low minimum wage. FEMA's recent announcement to take back 35,000 still occupied trailers across the gulf coast region means that homelessness is about to get much worse. The demolition of 4,500 intact public housing units by HUD and selling the land and plans to private developers is one of several assaults on public services, felt as a series of blows to the people of the city. Nearly a billion dollars will be paid to private developers to vastly reduce available affordable housing. United Nations officials recently called for an immediate halt to the demolitions of public housing in New Orleans saying the demolitions are in violation of human rights: "The spiraling costs of private housing and rental units, and in particular the demolition of public housing, puts these communities in further distress, increasing poverty and homelessness," said a joint statement by UN experts in housing and minority issues. "We therefore call on the Federal Government and State and local authorities to immediately halt the demolitions of public housing in New Orleans." Similar calls have been made by Senators Clinton and Obama. Despite these calls, the demolitions continue.

And so, New Orleans is the perfect backdrop for the announcement of the SPP: sweeping decisions adversely affecting huge demographics of people are met with a desperate cry, gone unheard by the rest of the nation. As public schools, hospitals and housing are shut down, boarded up and bulldozed we are made to feel utterly helpless, without even the highest supranational institutions or national figures able to demand a halt to such destructive economic policies.

The People's Summit was one of a small number of events organized around Bush's meeting. Using popular education, we learned "Who profits and how: NAFTA + and Katrina Profiteering," and created a political power-analysis turned round circle discussion, facilitated by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. The sessions were attended by community organizers, an international public service workers union representative, Mexican trade unions, activists from Chiapas, American and Canadian youth, citizen journalists and media activists, a US farmer union representative, social workers, non-profit organizations, worker justice coalitions, New Orleanian community members and concerned citizens. All participated in the critical race theory workshop that the Peoples Institute is known and loved for; yet the dialogue literally went in circles, and never moved beyond self-reflection. No part of the Summit focused on the immediate opportunity to envision and coordinate how we might challenge Bush, Calderon and Harper at this critical moment during the conference and moving forward.

Ironically, at an international Summit, facilitators asked that we divide ourselves into national groups to name similarities of the privatization scheme of New Orleans and in the cities and spaces we were visiting from; a conversation more useful to know about each other's communities, information which might enable us to connect parallel struggles, a rare opportunity to create our own linkages across heavily guarded borders.

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For all of the long-winded talk on giving voices to disenfranchised people around the world, taking cues from these people and their communities, learning from each other and creating access to decision-making, none of our Mexican comrades who traveled the long and painstaking journey across borders and visa bureaucracy were ever asked what they thought should happen at this Summit. There was no room made to discuss and learn from the often successful strategies for organizing resistance to destructive neo-colonial economic policies emerging throughout Mexico during the past fifteen years. No facilitator asked the group of Mexican comrades "what can we do here?" Instead they were asking "why should we all care?" Everybody at the Summit must have known not only why they should care, but what might happen if nobody does, or else they wouldn't have cared enough to attain visas, miss work and show up.

This lack of communication by the Summit organizers and attendant groups was so explicit that the Canadian youth assembled their own protest to the executive announcement of the SPP, but the Americans were in workshops and did not think it part of the Summit, or perhaps didn't know of it at all, and so did not attend. This march took place far from where the presidents shook hands and the cameras rolled, making it even easier for our discord to remain unheard.

During the rest of Bush's visit in New Orleans, workshops across the city had us reflecting on the privatization of housing, healthcare and education, changing legal systems, trade agreements, the exploitation of workers, who holds control of food and energy systems, forced migration in a global economy, militarization of north America, and community responses to the SPP.

Perhaps the best material outcomes of the People's Summit were the personal connections made running between workshops sessions. My new ally from Chiapas is surprised at such little participation from the US, though he said he understood that it was because of misinformation, repression and large distances. He asked me why I thought the American "left" did not participate. Agreeing with his logic I added that we do not share a collective identity in the US and so are very unorganized around social and economic issues; we spend much time observing our divisions and little time creating spaces for the unified society we dream and preach about. Speaking with another gentleman from Mexico after the long winded sessions were over, he asked what the break-out group of Americans discussed, and I said they were talking about white responsibility but not saying much, like Americans do. He laughed; agreeing, said I should have been sitting with the Mexican delegation because they were discussing that very point.

O. Katz is an activist from New York City who has come to New Orleans several times since the Federal Flood.

MayDay Workers March to City Hall, Meeting Promised



NEW ORLEANS, May 1—Assembling at noon on International Workers Day, more than 200 workers and supporters marched from Louis Armstrong Park, the northern edge of the French Quarter, to New Orleans City Hall to meet Mayor Ray Nagin.

Marchers detoured the route toward the river for the purpose of stopping at the World Trade Center to have a moment of silence. They also called upon both the Honduran and Mexican Apostolate's to continue aiding workers from those countries against abusive contractors and discriminatory local police.

Upon reaching City Hall, a mayoral representative met the group on the granite steps and promised that the mayor will meet with the group of workers within 30 days.

Organizers and workers called this a first step in having city officials recognize the incredible contribution of workers to the recovery of the city.

SHORTCHANGED: WAGE THEFT IN NEW ORLEANS

The following is a worker's testimony given at a U.S. Congressional field hearing headed by Congressman Dennis Kucinich in New Orleans last fall:

My name is José Victor Hernández. I am 31 years old and I am originally from El Salvador in Central America. This is my first time in the U.S. and I arrived here in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The main reason that I had to abandon my country was to look for a better life economically, which almost cost me my life. Upon leaving behind my home, my wife who was expecting our second child, and with a million tears in my eyes and a bag full of hopes and more questions than answers, I fixed my gaze upon the United States that so many times I heard my friends say was a place where you could work and make money. It is said that Hispanics are appreciated and recognized for their work in the United States; therefore I decided to come to New Orleans. I heard there was work here after the tragedy that we are sadly all too familiar with.

It took me about two weeks to find my first job. I have to say that the language barrier is one of the most difficult things to overcome; no one is interested in talking with someone that does not understand. Finally I found someone who was willing to give me a job. My boss told me that the only way he could pay me was under the table, which I accepted and he also then told me that way I would not have to worry about reporting taxes. The work was to remove trash in the streets, and we worked ten hours a day including Sundays. The first week I did not receive any pay because they held one week's pay from all the workers and they said it was according to the law. The next week upon receiving my pay, I noticed it was not complete and when I tried to talk with my boss about this, he told me that he did not understand what it was that I wanted to say. When finally he was able to understand me, he told me that he would have to go over his books in order to see where the error occurred and if there was a difference in my pay he would correct the problem, which he never did. I thought about quitting like some of my friends, but my boss never paid them for the week of pay he had held back. I continued working for that company, but every time I got paid it was the same problem. Sometimes the difference in my pay was not a whole lot, but on some occasions it was as much as $200.

Unfortunately, things began to get worse at this company when the bosses decided they wanted to be able to do more work in order to make more money for themselves, but meanwhile give even less money to the workers. They began to discount the time that they gave us for lunch and add two hours to our daily workload, so in this way we worked from six in the morning until six in the evening without a break.

In the end I had enough courage to quit this job. I have had all kinds of supervisors, from racists that think that we are slaves and don't want to give us breaks, to those that allow you a break every once in a while.

When I worked for that company I saw so many injustices against people that had no support from any government agencies, or that did not know what to do in certain situations. Oftentimes when something would happen, they would be told to be quiet and the most common threat was "if you say something, we will call Immigration (ICE)." The worst thing is to know that sometimes they would actually follow through on these threats in order to avoid paying someone for their work.

How long can so much injustice continue against us when all we want is to be able to live an honorable life with dignity? Sometimes they call us delinquents and take us to jail, when the only crime we are guilty of is to have been born poor and tried to make our lives and our families' lives more bearable. Thankfully there are places that exist like the Interfaith Worker Justice Center here and others that support us when there is still so much injustice we have to fight against daily as immigrant workers living in New Orleans.

Last week, we received an email update from José Victor who now lives in LA saying the following:

I have news for you, do you remember the time when I went to make my speech in front of the Congressman...? Well it worked because two days ago some one of my excoworkers called me and said they get some money back for the over time that they did a long time ago. Someone get almost $4,000 back and Gilberto got around $3,500, so they are very happy now. I might even get some money back too and I wanna say thanks to you.

For more information on where you can get help if you are not paid at work, please contact the Worker Resource Center: (504) 309-1776 or 3500 Canal Street, New Orleans.

SHUT IT DOWN!

the Local Movement to Close the Youth Study Center

By Matt Olson

NEW ORLEANS, January 19, 2007—New Orleanians and several local organizations voiced their support of a class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of juvenile inmates awaiting trial and housed at Orleans Parish's Youth Study Center. The lawsuit was filed by the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL), a local nonprofit. The lawsuit targets Richard Winder, the head of the city's Department of Human Services, and other facility leaders who JJPL claim have allowed inhumane conditions to continue despite mediation to avoid litigation. The conditions cited from youth testimony include the existence of rats and mold, the lack of educational services and adequately trained staff, and the practice of holding young people in their cells for at least 20 hours a day.

Dozens of concerned community members gathered under the covered cement basketball courts at Willie Hall Park directly across from the Youth Study Center on a cold and blustery day. They patiently listed to a broad range of speakers.

Using the facility as a backdrop, Dana Kaplan, Executive Director of JJPL, started the event with an update on the case.

"We filed a class action lawsuit on December 21 last year against Richard Winder and the leadership of the Youth Study Center. Kids are being held in that facility in inhumane conditions in violation of their constitutional rights," Kaplan said. "Since we filed that last lawsuit they have denied us access to the facility. We are no longer able to interview children. So yesterday we filed an emergency motion to a federal judge so that we could regain access. If the city is doing what it's supposed to do inside the Youth Study Center, why won't they let the children talk to their lawyers?"

Before filing the lawsuit, JJPL advocates and lawyers from Washington D.C. were meeting with youth inside the facility, gathering testimonies on the conditions inside that form the bulk of their civil suit. At that time and since JJPL's existence, any youth who asked to speak to an advocate with the organization would be granted that opportunity. Once JJPL filed a lawsuit, however, the city cut off all access to counsel for the youth at the facility, according to JJPL.

Officers present at the YSC have prevented lawyers and advocates from JJPL entered the facility. In addition, youth who ask for JJPL as counsel are no longer given an opportunity to speak to them, according to youth advocates. The emergency motion was filed to remedy this violation of the detained juveniles' constitutional rights to counsel.

Representatives from organizations such as Friends and Family of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC), Safe Streets/Strong Communities, Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools, and Fyre Youth Squad, as well as vocal residents, roundly condemned the city's refusal to improve conditions.



Supporters second line from the Youth Study Center along Bayou Road (inset) to John McDonogh Senior High School (top), connecting the security in schools to incarceration.

More than two years have passed since Hurricane Katrina's flooding damaged 57 percent of the building. FEMA already allocated up to $4 million to aid in the replacement of the building, which was estimated at $16 million. Winder, YSC's superintendent, has used the allocated funds for small and superficial repairs rather than

putting the funds into a coherent plan for building a new, better detention facility. Activists argue that Winder is intentionally wasting funds in order to restrict future alternatives for the facility.

Orleans Parish Juvenile Chief Judge David Bell and the national nonprofit Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative among other stakeholders agree that the city needs to build a more secure, more humane facility for detained youth awaiting trial in New Orleans. In addition, JJPL hopes any future facility would be more focused on rehabilitation and transition, especially in holding to its current name as a "study" or educational center.

"From what these young people are saying, things have not changed [at the Youth Study Center] in over forty years."

Joshua Short read brief statements from some incarcerated boys. Short is a member of Fyre Youth Squad, a cross-city student organization to demand better and more accountable schools.

"We want new staff, new clothes, new food, but really we want it closed," relayed Short. Another said, "I'm living like a dog." With negligible recreation or educational options as well as communal hygienic products and vermin, the young people await trial in this transitional facility, although they have not yet been adjudicated.

The Youth Study Center, originally built in 1959, remains as the lone transitional facility for arrested youth ages 8-16 who are awaiting trial. Despite the severe damage suffered by the center in the storm, it reopened in July 2006 with 12 beds. Currently, the devastated boys wing houses three beds for girls, while the girls wing currently houses twenty beds for boys.

Speaking for her peers with Fyre Youth Squad (FYS), high schooler Jessica Womack addressed other concerns with the facility in the post-Katrina landscape. "Centers such as these also do not have the capability to deal with special needs, disabilities and sometimes depression that happens in this post-Katrina society. FYS and I believe that this facility should be replaced by a better progressive alternative that lives up to its name," Womack said. "[The center] should be equipped with teachers, books, recreation rooms and other ways to positively spend time. Children should be educated not incarcerated."

Robert Goodman, a community organizer with Safe Streets/Strong Communities, spent time at the Youth Study Center decades ago.

"I am here today to stand in solidarity with Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana and children who have been forced to live in the dehumanizing conditions," Goodman emphasized.

"When I was a boy in the late 60's I also had the unfortunate experience of being in the Youth Study Center. There were no educational programs and we spent most of our time locked up in our cells. From what these young people are saying, things have not changed in over forty years."

Before heading off on a community second line through Gentilly and the Seventh Ward, Shedrick White, a poet with New Orleans Renaissance Society, spoke to the crowd. He had just come from the funeral of a sixteen-year-old boy and passionately lit into a poem describing a conversation between two young black men describing hard times. They speak past each other, one speaking of the thug and drug life while the other talks about just surviving oppression:

When I said my hood was hard, I wasn't talkin bout thuggin/

I was talking bout hard from hard times that comes from hard cold strugglin'/

See, it's hard for us to eat at Horse's or Copeland's 'cause all we can afford is churches/

And it's hard for us to get a visa or mastercard cause all we got is the Louisiana Purchase/

Hard is how my daddy worked but he didn't make much cash/

And as close as he came to pulling out a credit card is when he pulled out his bus pass

Amid a brass band and signs demanding the closure of the Youth Study Center, many residents danced, voiced support or even joined the protest second line—this most treasured cultural call to action. The route from Willie Hall Park to John McDonogh Senior High School explicitly brought together the two ends of the catch phrase "school-to-prison pipeline," wherein children are criminalized in schools and led directly to the gates of juvenile or adult prison. Not long ago, in spring of 2006, John McDonogh had more security guards than teachers.

From this symbolic march, the lawsuit and its promoters press forward to garner public and political support while chanting "Shut Down the YSC!"

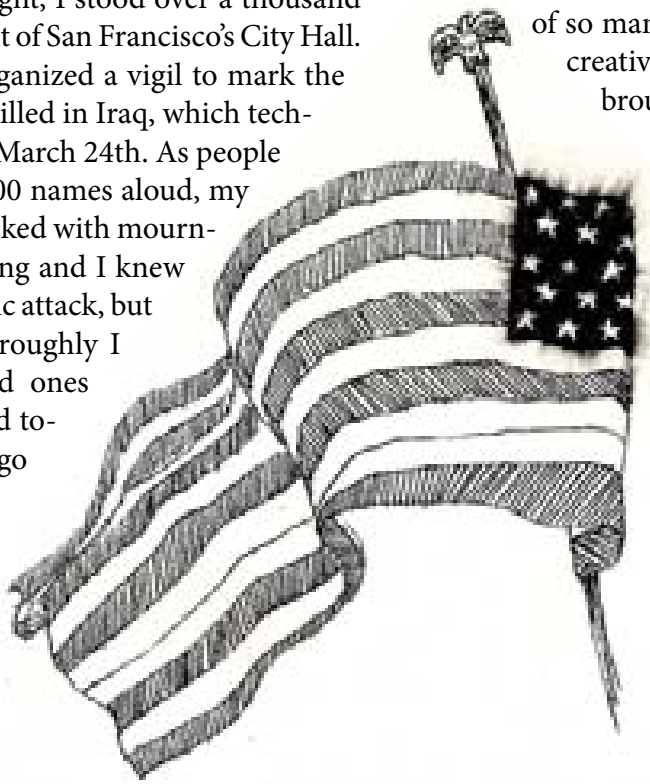
UPDATE: On April 17, JJPL staged a street play in front of City Hall demonstrating the inhumane conditions inside the YSC. After hosting a press conference, a group of concerned organizations brought more than 500 signed postcard letters to Mayor Ray Nagin's office. After an hour of waiting, Nagin still hadn't come out.

5TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICAN

NOT ONE MORE, WAR

by Clare Bayard

March 25, 2008—Last night, I stood over a thousand candles on the lawn in front of San Francisco's City Hall. Veterans for Peace had organized a vigil to mark the official 4,000 U.S. soldier killed in Iraq, which technically happened Sunday, March 24th. As people began reading the last 1,000 names aloud, my whole body suddenly wracked with mourning. My chest was exploding and I knew it wasn't a coronary or panic attack, but grief saturated me so thoroughly I could barely stand. Loved ones held me up as we mourned together; I could hardly let go of a former Marine friend who chose military jail instead of Iraq, and I had never felt such frantic, choking relief to have him standing alive beside me. I can't imagine the world without him now.



A Presbyterian minister, who participates in a similar annual vigil for the deaths of San Francisco's homeless people, began the ritual with a nondenominational invocation. She spoke of the tremendous loss of so many humans with all their talents and creativities, everything they might have brought to their communities.

I feel lucky to be alive today, walking in the spring sun and holding the fierce grief of so many deaths. I feel lucky that my father, a Vietnam Vet, is alive instead of a name on the black granite Wall in D.C., lucky that I was born.

But war doesn't play duck-duck-goose, bypassing most people entirely and just taking a scatter of heads. No one in Iraq lives separate from the war, and in a dramatically different way neither do we in the U.S.

War defines daily reality in occupied lands. Where wars are being fought in the streets and skies, where depleted uranium underfoot rises in plumes of dust and a sudden noise might be the last thing you hear, war is everything from the toxic air to the mined soil. In the U.S. there is a myth that war is just happening "over there" where bombs are vaporizing houses and human bodies. As if war was not already here, and as if the multi-variant violence of militarism does not return in the body of every veteran, alive or dead.



I say "technical count" because we don't even have the numbers to do the math, which means the full picture is beyond our grasp:

- 4,000 official U.S. servicemembers killed
- 1-6,000 U.S. servicemember suicides—inadmissible as war casualties
- over a thousand nonmilitary contractors, civilians, etc.
- how many debilitating injuries?

Plus how many deeply affected partners, parents, family members, friends, lovers in the life of each one of these tens of thousands? The children they might have had, and the ones some already did?

…and, echoing in barely broken silence, the deaths of 650,000 to over a million Iraqis.

My perspective on this is profoundly shaped by being raised by a veteran father; the war on Vietnam lived in my house every day when I was growing up. I was lucky enough to be born. To be housed. 1 in 4 homeless people in my city are veterans. My dad's class and race privilege and my mom's waged and unwaged work kept us housed and together, even though the war has never let him go. And in a way, I have come to understand myself as lucky to be the child of a war veteran, in the ways that it helps me to keep my heart alive during the



crushing numbness of this "endless war." I cannot see, or feel myself as disconnected from war—either from those murdered by U.S. occupation, or those within the ranks of our military who are struggling to stay human.

War comes into homefront communities in many ways. It is the wartime economy, where every bomb explodes twice: once shattering lives in Fallujah, Karbala, Basra; then burning up our schools and universities, healthcare, levees, social system. It is the racist dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims that inflames hate crimes of street violence and hate crimes of state legislature. It is where "security" means genocide, and none of us are made at all safer by U.S. empire expanding. And war comes into our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces and social spaces, cloaked in the silent roar of a taboo topic: how veterans return from war carrying the violence of militarism. Some kill themselves quickly, with a bullet or a rope, and even when these deaths occur on a base they are not part of the official tally. These 4,000 recognized deaths are the tip of the iceberg of U.S. war casualties. Domestic violence murders, almost entirely women, don't qualify even when under the clearest circumstances. Other vets die slowly, self-medicating with drugs or alcohol, often on the streets. Many strain enough healing through gritted teeth to put their life back together, supported by their loved ones, not by their government, not by the drivers of SUVs decorated with yellow ribbons, and largely not by the peace movement.

I do not mourn these 4,000 deaths (and the other invisibilized U.S. deaths) any more than the uncounted Iraqi lives, nor any less. The judgment that some lives are disposable is part of what we are struggling against, in demanding justice and peace. I don't hold these 4000 accountable for engineering this war, nor do I excuse them for participating. To do so would remove their agency in the situation, and dishonor the choices that many U.S. soldiers are making every day to refuse orders, resist compliance with occupation. I won't devalue the choices that the majority of young people in this country are making to not enlist at all, despite the outrageous lack of options facing them, especially working-class kids and youth of color. Every day, people act to resist the U.S. military, from around the world, from within its ranks. And how do we know how many of those names read out last night belong to resisters? How many were carrying an unloaded weapon, like Agustin Aguayo did for a year while the Army denied his conscientious objector status? How many were considering going AWOL? How many were pursuing, if they knew the option existed, a conscientious objector status? How many had done something recently to stand up to racism, misogyny, or some random violence within their unit?

Mostly we'll never know because now their mouths are filled with dirt and their stories will be carried only by those surviving them. The singers among them, the writers, the kid who was so good at math, the girl with the fierce will, the boy who protected his best friend from queerbashers, the dreamers, the confused, the 20 year old with a 2 year old daughter, the one who died so homesick, the one who learned Arabic to talk to the neighborhood kids, all the ones you and I will never meet, who died in a country that's losing millions of its people to death and escape.

Some kill themselves quickly, with a bullet or a rope...Other vets die slowly, self-medicating with drugs or alcohol, often on the streets.

We do not stop organizing. We can't. But as we keep organizing, we do also need to mourn. It keeps us human to mourn, to truly recognize the grievous loss of millions of people, to stand with their loved ones in remembrance and in defiance—to spit in the face of war. We say: no more lives, war, we will not feed you. All of us are needed, and war, we shall starve you.

Clare Bayard heads the Anti-War program of Catalyst Project, organizing to connect work against wars abroad with domestic racial and economic justice struggles, and building the G.I. resistance support movement. Clare serves on the National Committee and Organizing Task Force of the War Resisters League, an organization that seeks to end all wars and the root causes of war.

A CALL TO DISOBEDIENCE

Editorial By Robert Desmarais Sullivan

It is time for the United States military personnel to disobey their commander-in-chief in order to obey their oath to defend the country and the Constitution. The uniform represents their intention to serve, and we owe support to the troops if they do so. If their service is consciously unconstitutional, then they do not deserve our support. The uniform must mean what it was intended to mean, or the person who wears it dishonors it.

The men and women now serving in uniform have obeyed the commander-in-chief. They believe they are obliged to do so. I believe that they are obliged to refuse to obey when he violates our traditions and our laws. It is not patriotic to obey the orders of the president when the president violates the Constitution, the specious arguments of infamous legal advisors notwithstanding. The Constitution does not ask for obedience from Congress; it demands transparent debates and public votes. The president must be disobeyed in order to save the country and its Constitution.

Given this president's assertion that the nation is fighting a "global war on terror" and that he is commander in chief of the war, his persistent linkage of the Iran regime with terror has to be seen as a deliberate propagandistic effort to assert his right to carry the fight to that country. This president has repeatedly insisted that the 2001 Congressional Authorization that legalized the invasion of Afghanistan was also an authorization for an unending "war on terror."

In brief, this president interprets congressional authorization for attacking Afghanistan as an unlimited congressional declaration of war. He thus sees the United States in a perpetual state of war, and he sees himself as empowered to order any American anywhere to obey him in military matters, and in corollary he also judges himself authorized to imprison and torture anyone anywhere, including Americans, whom he designates 'enemy combattants'. The United States under this president has become Sparta, not Athens.

The war against Iraq has been a strategic blunder. There were no weapons of mass destruction, and this president and his administration knew it. They lied to the world. As a result of invading Iraq pre-emptively, the world, notably the Islamic world, now despises Americans.

This war has been immoral in conception and in execution. In conception, in did not satisfy the traditional criteria of a just war, if such even exists today, and the Pope, the Dalai Lama, and millions of ordinary citizens condemned it by marching in the streets of the world before this president gave the orders. In execution, it has created civil war within Iraq, killed over a million human beings, maimed emotionally and physically millions more, rendered homeless even more, encouraged shock-torture by Americans, and nurtured suicidal terrorists in greater number than ever.

This war is theologically offensive to non-fundamentalist Christians. The president himself may actually believe that he is divinely chosen to bring about Armageddon to assure the second coming of Christ. If that is so, he is devoting the military power of the US to a theologically skewed interpretation of the Christian tradition. The majority of us do not believe the president is inspired by God.

No loyal soldier should serve a disloyal leader. Loyalty to the United States demands disobedience to this commander's orders. Most members of Congress have been servile in this crisis. It is necessary for the military, the Congress, and the people to refuse to obey the commander-in-chief for the sake of the country.

Robert Desmarais Sullivan is an active member of the Unitarian Universalist Church and a voice for peace in New Orleans.



A woman holds up a "Stump Sock," a garment designed to keep amputated limbs warm, at a "Ragin' Grannies Knit-In during a 5th Anniversary of the Iraq War Protest in New York City,

"We Will Not Stand Idly By:" Vigil Marks Guantanamo Day of Awareness and Action

By Evan Casper-Futterman

New Orleans, January 11, 2008—As federal employees emptied out of the Hale Boggs Federal Building on Poydras street, they were met with an unusual and uncomfortable sight. Outside of the front entrance of the federal building were eight Guantánamo "detainees," clad in orange jumpsuits and black head coverings to simulate the first pictures of the prisoners being held there in 2002.

Though the protest group in New Orleans was small—eight detainees and another half dozen supporters—their actions occurred today in conjunction with dozens of other similar actions and consciousness-raising events around the United States and around the world. Hundreds of pedestrians and motorists slowed down as they passed by to examine the brightly dressed group.



Evan Casper-Futterman

Activists, in orange garb, stand in front of the Hale Boggs Federal Building in the Central Business District of New Orleans.

Beginning with a song of prayer, the assembled "detainees" stood in silent vigil while the names of current and former prisoners of the Guantánamo detention facility were read. The name reading lasted around forty-five minutes, as each dressed detainee removed his or her head covering to read from the list of names.

This action, which was sponsored in the United States by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), marks the six-year anniversary of the detention facility, which has become iconic of the worst aspects of the "war on terrorism" and the new homeland security paradigm of the United States government: greater military involvement in civil and diplomatic affairs, decreased transparency, greater impunity for criminal acts committed by government officials, and a disregard for domestic and international laws and treaties. This is in addition to the growing body of evidence that points to the fact, beyond the moral depravity of torture, that it does not even accomplish the ends for which it is implemented.

The theme of the vigil, "We Will Not Stand Idly By" was chosen by the local organizers to represent the need to act when one has witnessed such unconscionable acts and deeds committed supposedly on one's behalf. The event was locally organized by New Orleans Christian Radicals and Peacemakers (NOCRAP).

For more information, see http://www.witnesstorture.org

upcoming events in new orleans

May 1 — May Day Workers March
12pm, Louis Armstrong Park
901 N. Rampart St.

May 4 — FILM: A Dream in Doubt
Free Film Screening
by Tami Yeager
6:00 PM
Ashé Cultural Arts Center
1712 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd.

America's first post-9/11 hate crime murder punctuated a growing wave of violence in retaliation for the terror attacks, told through the eyes of the victim's brother

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May 6 — FILM: Taxi to the Dark Side
2008 Academy Award Winner, directed by Alex Gibney.
Playing thru May 15
ZEITGEIST
1622 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd.

May 10 — Greater New Orleans Organizers Roundtable
4pm-7pm
Children's Defense Fund
1452 N. Broad St.

May 10 — Holy Cross walk with the
Holy Cross Neighborhood Association
5130 Chartres St., time TBD

City Walks, sponsored by local anti-violence organization SilenceIsViolence, link neighborhoods to nurture solidarity among all citizens as we work toward a more peaceful city. We honor our strong, distinctive neighborhoods, while we express unity in seeking a safer New Orleans.

May 15 -17 — **Second National Symposium on Race, Place, and the Environment After Katrina: Reclaiming, Rebuilding, Revitalizing**
Hosted by Deep South Center for Environmental Justice of Dillard University
JW Marriot Hotel, 614 Canal St.

The main objective of the symposium will be to examine the extent to which communities in the Gulf Coast have been able to replace infrastructure, obtain loans, locate permanent housing, and rebuild neighborhoods, institutions, and businesses in a safe and sustainable way.

May 18 — Vigil for Peace
Every Third Sunday
Palmer Park

May 23 — New Orleans Indymedia Public Meeting!
7pm-9pm, location TBD

Come to be involved in local news writing and photography, and to shape what this magazine is all about!

June 20 - 22 — Democracy at Work:
3rd National Conference of Worker Cooperatives and Democratic Workplaces

We're preparing for three days of information exchange and skill-sharing, thinking about our place in a larger movement for economic justice, creating connections with each other and other groups, and continuing to build our national Federation.
To get involved in planning or volunteering, contact us at info@usworker.coop or (415) 379-9201.

