

Community CONNECTION

November - December 2009

The Voice, The Pulse, Of Our Village

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COVER PHOTO BY: SARAH TOMGHESSON - RHODES



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“Stop allowing landlords to raise our rents the additional two percent per year just because they pay electric and gas.”

WRITTEN BY: LA CAN

PHOTOGRAPH BY: NICHOLAS DAHMANN

Residents Fight for Rent Stabilization Reforms

The City of Los Angeles is currently undergoing a review of its Rent Stabilization Ordinance, or RSO as it is commonly called. The city hasn't thoroughly reviewed the RSO or its impacts since 1995.

In its current form, the RSO covers any housing in the City of Los Angeles built before 1979 if there are two or more units on the same parcel of land. Additionally, it provides numerous protections for tenants, including limiting the amount an owner can raise your rent each year. For example, this year the allowable increase is six percent if the owners pays for light and gas and four percent if they do not. The RSO also protects you from being evicted without cause. In fact, under the RSO you can only be evicted for 12 reasons.

The RSO review began in April of 2007 when the City of Los Angeles contracted with the Economic Roundtable to conduct a study for \$957,000. The study was conducted between June 2007 and June 2009 and resulted in 28 recommendations. The major finding is that landlords and property owners are doing well while we, low-income tenants, are not! Even though we all know this, it apparently takes paying researchers a lot of money for the city itself to find out.

Study findings include that 20 percent of people are rent burdened -- paying between



STEVE DIAZ, LA CAN, AND OTHER PARTNERS PRESENT ON THE TENANT-FOCUSED PANEL REQUESTED BY HOUSING AND COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE CHAIR, COUNCILMEMBER HERB WESSON

30 to 50 percent of their income in rent. Thirty-one percent reported being severely rent burdened -- paying over 50 percent of income on their rent. Another important finding is there is no link between what the landlord actually pays for gas and electricity and the extra two percent that they are allowed charge in rent increase each year. This additional increase creates a windfall for landlords and a burden for tenants - including almost all tenants living in residential hotels.

LA CAN has been working on our own recommendations for RSO reforms with partners in South LA and East LA. Our primary demands are: stop allowing landlords to raise our rents the additional two percent just because they pay light and gas; eliminate the 3% minimum rent hike, which would establish a rent freeze in the coming year due to the economic crisis; and eliminate fees that are now passed through to tenants.

With our community partners, we are also fighting for the expansion of the RSO to cover

all housing built before 1995 (instead of 1979). Most of these units are located in South LA and East LA, where many low-income tenants live and need stronger protections. Such an expansion would make sure greedy developers have less control over our rents and our communities. This demand requires legislative action at both the state and local level, but we are beginning this fight now since the topic is before our City Council.

Over the coming months many more hearings will be happening. The Council must hear from us about why our demands and reforms are so crucial. LA CAN members will be present, but we also need more people involved!

To learn more about these issues and about ways to participate, come to LA CAN's Housing Committee meetings every Monday at 11a.m., or just stop by our office at 530 S. Main Street anytime. Come and join us in the fight for our housing rights!

BOTTOM'S UP GOD

Yo yo yo yo Big OG,
It's the Mack
Please 4give me 4 my sins – I pray I walk again
An' brother come home from the pen
Pray I don't run with the devil no mo'
Apologize 4 cussing you out
Apologize 4 taking some of your children out
Lord please listen: pray for my moms, tell her
2 listen; Pray 4 all the bangers, hoes addicts,
hustlers, thugs
And hope they wake up
Tell judges, haters, critics
That if they can't teach them 2 fish, then shut up
Those without sin cast the first stone
Pray I find a soul mate so I don't live alone

Pray 4 me 2 better understand
So since I'm serving you I pray for the
southsiders, police and klan
Pray 4 no AIDS, wars or drugs – you be my
only high
Tell George and Mendell Bowen I said Hi
Tell Ben Kapone, S-man, Gnut, Wolf, K.O.,
P. Steve, Fat Man, Ghost, Lil Skebo, Droopy
B, Baby Knot, Rosko, Be Bop, Santa Klause,
Bizarro, Abay, Pumpkin, G. Brown, Lil K.B.,
Pscyklone, Puddin, Mausberg, Kountry, Laniac,
Be Brazy, 2BEup
Tell T Tiger, Neversweat, Crazy Ray, Jeriko,
Sharky, Baby Fee, Fat Rat, Bozo, Tookie,
Raymond W, 2CEup,
Tell Tupac, Biggie, Mac Dre, Pimp C, Big Pun,
Easy E don't stop rappin

Tell Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Huey Newton, Fred Hampton, Bunchie Carter, Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Michael ZinZun, George Jackson and Manchild don't stop scrappin'

Tell James Brown, Ray Charles, Billie Holliday, Curtis Mayfield, Barry White, Marvin Gaye, Jimi Hendrix, Minnie Ripperton, Nat King Cole, Rick James, Bob Marley, Mahalia and Michael Jackson don't stop singing

Tell Aaliyah, Left Eye and all the other fly girls what's happening

And 4 all the other soldiers 2 pray 4 me – hope to Be or Ce y'all 1 day – That would be nice
If not, just send me down some cold, cold, Ice!

AMEN

By: Tim "Big Mack" Mackey
bigmack2x68@yahoo.com

Smile More and Be Happy!



-“For myself, celebrating another birthday, I want to age gracefully and healthy aging starts with taking care of the factors in your control.”

WRITTEN BY: LINDA VALVERDE

There is an epidemic attacking Americans. It is the second largest cause of preventable death in America, behind only tobacco use! What is the killer? Unhealthy eating and physical inactivity.

But there is good news, the epidemic is preventable and treatment does not include expensive drugs or doctor visits. The cure is improving your health by eating the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables and increasing physical activity. By creating and following a plan that highlights exercise and a healthy diet you can help prevent many serious health problems like heart disease, certain types of cancer, type 2 diabetes, and obesity.

As a nutrition education promoter, I am committed to raising awareness about the importance of healthy food and physical activity. Moreover, I understand that while our food choices are oftentimes limited [a reality reinforced by a lack of a full service grocery stores and very tight budgets] it is important that we collectively understand the long-term impacts of unhealthy eating and lack of exercise.

For myself, celebrating another birthday I want to age gracefully and healthy aging starts with taking care of the factors in your control. Although we sometimes have to consume unhealthy food just because it is cheap or free, we can also try and make healthy choices as much as possible. And we can also incorporate physical activity or exercise into our daily lives - it costs nothing and the benefits are huge!

Start with improving your diet and exercising, like taking daily walks and eating one or two extra fruits or vegetables each day. Then move into brain fitness -- boost your happiness by focusing on positive things and try reducing negative thinking. Too many negative thoughts and your brain will respond by creating stress and sadness in your body. Even when life feels totally

overwhelming, try and make time once a day to focus on positive thoughts and ideas.

When you add more positive thoughts your brain will create relaxation and happiness:

- Don't judge yourself too harshly
- Smile
- After a few days of doing this it will help erase negative thoughts.

SMILE MORE AND BE HAPPY! Happy people tend to have a few things in common:

- Very social
- Energetic
- Decisive
- Creative
- Trusting
- Loving
- Responsive

Add exercise:

- If you feel run down go for a brisk walk or a run
- Your bones need stimulation to stay strong
- Exercise is a great way to meet people and be more social.
- Keep your brain sharp! Why? Physical activity requires a lot of participation from our brain. In exercise you must make quick decisions, judgment calls and also exercising releases chemicals that make you feel good. It improves your ability to relax and this makes you HAPPY! It also reduces the risk of dementia.

So come and join your friends in the community for a healthy walk. The LA CAN walking group meets on Friday mornings at 530 S. Main St. at 10:00 AM. Please call Linda at (213) 228-0024 to reserve your spot!

Looking For Justice?

WE MIGHT JUST HAVE WHAT YOU NEED AT THE COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINIC

Have you recently received a "quality of life" citation? Some examples include jaywalking, sitting on a crate, littering, recycling, etc.

➤

Has the LAPD, Sheriff's Dept., Highway Patrol, BID Security, City Clean-Up Crew or any other government employee taken or destroyed your

➤

Has your landlord told you to leave; makes you change rooms every twenty-eight days; served you with eviction papers; or simply to respond to your requests for repairs?

Every WEDNESDAY NIGHT at 6:00 PM

530 S. Main Street
Wednesday Nights 6:00 - 8:00 PM
LAST Intake at 6:30 PM
For More Info: 213-228-0024

"Life without liberty is like a body without spirit."
--KAHLIL GIBRAN

Member Highlight



My name is James. I am a member at **LA CAN**. I became a member through my friend Dogon.

I was introduced to many staff and members and I started working at the front desk. I met a lot of interesting people who were having problems with evictions, landlord abuse, jay walking tickets, housing issues, the abuse and harassment by Police Officers. It felt good that we at **LA CAN** were able to bring people together and help people.

You can now see the love, the caring and friendliness that was locked deep inside of me during the 15 years of living downtown and seeing the pain, anger, the abuse by police officers and landlords. I was locked in a world of negativity and it was killing my core qualities. As a member of **LA CAN** these qualities are active in my life and I notice that the staff and members have the same qualities. Right now I am learning my human rights at "Know Your Rights" trainings and also tenants rights at our housing meetings. I am developing leadership at **LA CAN**. I am learning how to speak out at city council meetings at City Hall and other places where decisions get made.

All these trainings have made me stronger and knowledgeable in my fight for justice. I am looking forward to Community Watch training and helping more people in our community join our fight for justice. **LA CAN** is about developing leaders to change the injustices to our **HUMAN RIGHTS** and that is why I am a member at **LA CAN**. Now I am part of a family of leaders that can make changes. So come on down and get involved!

"The rhetoric doesn't match our reality, our data, or our every day lives and struggles."

WRITTEN BY: LA CAN

What exactly is the "housing pipeline" and how is it ending homelessness?

We have heard a lot of local officials talking recently about how much they have done to address homelessness. At a Horizon Institute convening in October 2009, Mayor Villaraigosa repeated his claim that he has put more permanent supportive housing in the "pipeline" than the previous three mayoral terms combined. In November 2009, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority released its updated homeless count, claiming that homelessness decreased by 38% due, at least in part, to the City's permanent supportive housing program.

Homeless and other very poor people, as well as the groups that provide housing or services to them, know it isn't true that homelessness is decreasing or that housing options are expanding. If that were the case, we wouldn't have lines up and down the street to try and get a housing application or just to get a shelter bed for the night. We wouldn't see, as the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing recently observed, the streets of Skid Row lined with sleeping bags and tents at night, or people literally packed in like sardines in the Midnight Mission courtyard. But LA's "leaders" who are playing with numbers, not interacting with people, will tell you a different story.

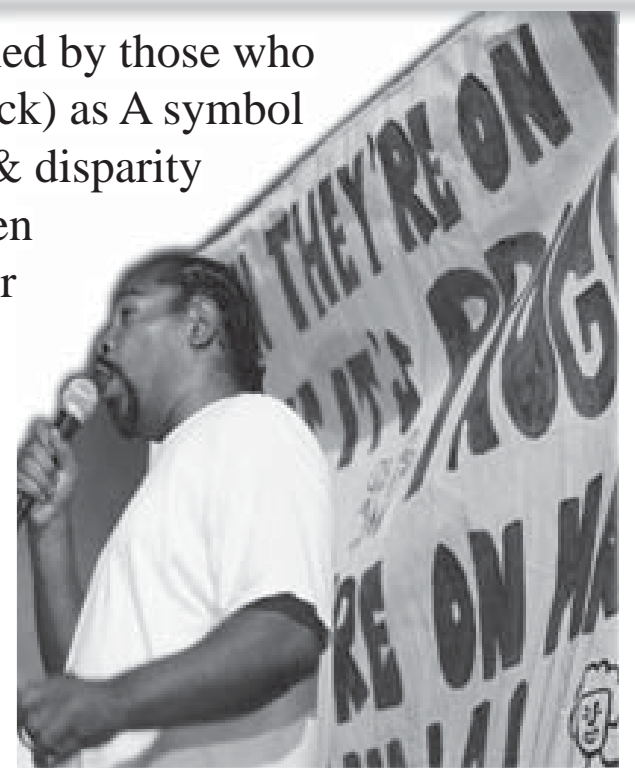
The "housing pipeline" is one of the popular terms in describing success. Local officials start counting housing units as soon as one step forward is taken in developing the housing - i.e. land is secured, some funding is allocated, etc. However, the development process for permanent supportive housing, or other deeply affordable housing that homeless people can access, involves dozens of steps, multiple funding applications, and other processes that take years. Some of the projects in the "pipeline" are never completed at all. The "pipeline" is important because we desperately need housing and we need projects in development to achieve that - but no one can actually LIVE in the "pipeline."

By our count, the City has put 1,290 permanent supportive housing units in the "pipeline" since the Mayor took office. It should be noted that this includes both new construction AND rehabilitated units - so it will not result in a net gain of 1,290 units. Additionally, to date just 455 of those are actually open and housing people - single adults, families and/or youth. That's 455 units available to serve between 25,000 and 40,000 homeless people (depending on whose stats you believe) in the City of Los Angeles. This would account for the recent claim that homelessness has gone down in the region by more than 20,000 people? Not possible - even if the "pipeline" was actually housing that real people could live in.

Last, let's look at how the 1,290 housing units in the proverbial pipeline, or the 455 that were opened, compare to the 12 years prior to this Mayor's election? In Skid Row alone, there were 1,685 new or rehabilitated supportive housing units **opened** during that time, in addition to a few hundred others citywide. Our Mayor's claims just don't hold up.

The rhetoric of our public officials doesn't match our reality, our data, or our every day lives and struggles. It's up to us to tell the real story - join LA CAN's housing committee to get involved!

Gentrification is defined by those who reside on skid row (mostly Black) as A symbol of "defecation" on the misery & disparity of an exploited & DownTrodden population that wallows in your "secretion." After that same population actually brought the value of your property up! Safer streets? 27,000 arrests? Squandering tax-payers money? Hiring more improperly trained racist police? So you can attract tourists & feel comfortable walking your dog down Main Street? Tells me gentrification means: continued perpetuation of catastrophe!



WRITTEN BY: TWIN, THE SKID ROW POET

“We will survive because this is a community of friends and together we can make a difference.”

WRITTEN BY: LINDA VALVERDE
PHOTOGRAPH BY: KELSEY LONGMUIR

TAKE BACK THE NIGHT

More than 70% of downtown Los Angeles’ female residents have experienced domestic violence or sexual assault according to a community survey conducted in 2007. The Downtown Women’s Action Coalition (DWAC) aims to, among other goals, prevent and appropriately respond to violence against women in Skid Row as well as raise awareness about the issues of violence.

For me, living and working in Skid Row for the past seven years, I have had the privilege to know and work closely with many women who have taught me so very much about the real significance of finding meaning in our lives after violence. I myself, a survivor of violence, am healing the wounds and speaking out and finding the healing process that is now coming full circle.

On November 6, 2009 DWAC held its fourth annual Take Back the Night, creating a place where we are free from sexual assault and abuse and where we can collectively heal. About forty DWAC members and other community residents and supporters took to the street with our march, rally and speak out to say “STOP the violence!” We marched through the community and stopped along the way to share poems and stories not just about our experiences and where we’ve been but where we are going and how to get there.

There were both heartbreaking and inspiring stories of survival, of forgiveness and gratitude. At the end of the march, we held a speak out, shared hot chocolate and pastries and ended our “Take Back



the Night” with the song by Gloria Gaynor “I Will Survive.” We will survive because this is a community of friends and together we can make a difference.

We invite you to become part of the solution, part of the end to physical, sexual and other violence. There are many ways to take a stand, to break the silence. We hope that next year many more of our community residents will join us in Take Back the Night and other DWAC events and activities. If you would like to get involved in the Downtown Women’s Action Coalition please join us every third Tuesday of each month at 2:30 p.m. at 530 S. Main St. or just come on by and speak with DWAC Co-Chair Deborah Burton get involved!

Note: Special thanks to the DWAC/Take Back the Night planning committee: Sydney Kopp-Richardson and Ms. Beasley from Lamp Community, and Linda Valverde and Pam Jernagin from LA CAN.

SOUND OFF Downtown residents sound off on their opinion of new LAPD Chief



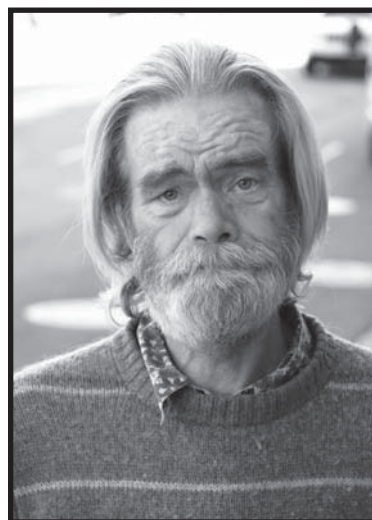
“I don’t know that much about Charlie Beck yet, but if he’s going to continue Chief Bratton’s policies, I don’t think he will do good.”

--Willie James



“So I read about Beck and saw him on the news, but the only real police chief I can remember is Tom Bradley and it has not been the same since. But I do hope the new Chief does good for all of us.”

--Carol Castille



“Don’t know anything about him, but I hope he’s for the people.”

--Reid Dempsey



“It is too early to judge Beck. From what I have seen on the news about him is that his family is police and he has been in the business a long time. So, we’ve got to try him.”

--Jorge



WRITTEN BY: LA CAN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY: Nick Dahmann

LA CAN Members and Supporters Call for the End of Safer Cities

“We’re still here” was the message from community residents, as members of the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN), supporters and allies came out to protest the 3rd anniversary of the Safer Cities Initiative (SCI). Over two days in late September, hundreds of people came together on the steps on LAPD’s Central Division and in City Hall chambers to raise their voices against oppressive policing in downtown LA’s Skid Row community.

In September 2006 Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo, and LAPD Chief William Bratton launched the SCI program that brought approximately 110 additional officers to skid row to police a 50-block area. Although promises were made that additional community services would also be added to the community and enforcement would focus on serious and violent criminals, that never was the case. Skid Row is home to about 15,000 residents; 75% are African American, 95% are extremely low-income, and about one-third are currently homeless. Poor and Black residents have been the targets of this unprecedented level of policing.

The first day of SCI, residents watched the horrifying sight of 50 rookie officers walking single file up the street with white rubber gloves and white rubber handcuffs around their waist band – the first visual of the occupation of our community. Since then, there have been 27,000 arrests made in Skid Row, very few for violent crimes. There have also been about 1,000 citations issued each month, primarily for pedestrian violations,

which is 48 to 69 times the rate of citations issued citywide.

Using conservative estimates by the City Attorney, SCI arrests have cost the City and County more than \$118 million. SCI also earned Los Angeles the title of the “Meanest City” in the United States to homeless people – up from 18th prior to SCI. All of this injustice just so the “new downtowners” can walk their thousand-dollar French poodles down Main Street without experiencing their racist fears of seeing poor black and brown faces in “their” neighborhood.

The Community is Under Attack – What Do we Do? Fight Back!

On September 28, 2009 community residents came together to speak out and fight back against three years of racist oppression and the intentional criminalization of an entire community. Community residents, both housed and homeless, convened at LAPD’s Central Division station to occupy LAPD’s space, as they have been occupying the community. The night was filled with guerilla theatre, spoken word, rally cries, know your rights teach-ins, and a camp out. Hundreds of people got up close and personal with the police to show that we ain’t scared, that this is our community, and that we demand an end to SCI policing. LAPD officers tried to enforce the City’s noise ordinance, but that didn’t stop us from singing “Hell no, we won’t go” all night long to funky beats played by the Skid Row drummers.

The next morning we descended on City Hall. We started outside, handing out SCI “quality of life” citations to City Hall workers and visitors. Then, about 150 people gathered in Council Chambers to demand action from elected officials struggling to address a budget crisis and proposed cuts to LAPD. Councilmember Jan Perry, Skid Row’s representative and acting President, skipped the first item of public comment to avoid hearing from us. After about 90 minutes of

other agenda items, we decided we would not be silenced all day and LA CAN members and supporters disrupted the council meeting shouting “public comment now.”

In response, Council President Eric Garcetti announced that public comment would be called next. More than 40 residents and supporters took the podium and held council members accountable for their failure to act to protect human and civil rights in Skid Row. They were also called out for continuing to waste millions of dollars in the midst of a severe budget crisis. City Council members are elected public officials, by the people and for the people, and they must be held publicly accountable. After hearing and feeling our pain about what we’re going through everyday, Councilmember Rosendahl spoke out, said the people should be listened to, and introduced a motion that SCI must be reviewed.

If we got to go to the moon to get justice, then we are strapping on our boots, putting on our helmets, and blasting off. Now that you know what’s going on, you’re duty bound to get involved.



“I really heard here many many stories and testimonies on precariousness. Precariousness and housing rights violations in a country that is one of the richest and wealthiest countries of the world, which has been a model of economic social organization and had exported this model for the world. It’s very important and that is one of the reasons why I am here, to show who is in and who is out of this model, who is part of it and who is excluded.”

Raquel Rolnik, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing

WRITTEN BY: LA CAN
PHOTOGRAPH BY: NICK DAHMANN

United Nations Investigates National Housing Crisis: LA CAN Coordinates Historic Visit

There was a buzz starting in the streets of Los Angeles. Murmurs could be heard from Jefferson Park to Skid Row; Mac Arthur Park to Boyle Heights; Koreatown to Venice Beach; Pacoima to South Central; and beyond. Word was that the United Nations had finally managed to schedule a mission in the United States that would focus on the Right to Adequate Housing. This would mark the very first time that such a mission was allowed and a major milestone in the fight to establish the human right to housing in our country.

Working with other groups across LA and the nation, LA CAN has put the human faces on the suffering caused by the housing crisis. National partnerships, collaboration and coalition building quickly highlighted one fact: that our local housing ailments are not unique and that a concerted national response is needed to restore housing rights and human dignity. The issues of homelessness, shrinking numbers of truly affordable housing units, the constant erosion of public housing, and the great foreclosure tsunami were but some of the issues that needed immediate investigation by the Rapporteur.

On the national scene LA CAN has worked closely with both the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative and the National Law Center on Homeless and Poverty to focus on housing and health as human rights. It was because of this work that LA CAN was selected LA’s City Chair for this historic visit.

The human right to housing consists of seven elements: Security of Tenure; Availability of Services, Materials, and Infrastructure; Affordability; Accessibility; Habitability; Location; and Cultural Adequacy. All seven elements must be present and cannot be separated, bartered, horse-traded, or given away in exchange for political campaign promises. This right to housing framework gives us a tool for holding the government accountable if all the elements are not satisfied - as certainly is the case in Los Angeles and most all cities or towns across the country.



By way of background, the tug-of-war to enforce the human right to housing in the United States has more closely resembled a lengthy bureaucratic waltz. First, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was established in 1948. The right to housing was further codified in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1966 (ICESCR). The US has signed the ICESCR, but has not ratified it -- an attempt by our government to try and avoid being strictly bound to uphold the right to housing.

Further, the U.S. has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which recognize the right to non-discrimination on the basis of race or other status, including in housing.

While these international standards and enforcement mechanisms can be a bit confusing, one thing is crystal clear: the United States historically was willing to support the concept of housing as a human right, but was not willing to be held accountable for making the concept a reality for all Americans.

Let the dance continue.

LA CAN and more than 20 other local organizations worked to plan the visit to Los Angeles by Raquel Rolnik, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing in early November. Ms. Rolnik had visited Washington DC, New York City,

Chicago, New Orleans and Pine Ridge South Dakota before arriving in Los Angeles. As in the other cities, LA’s investigation activities included meetings with public officials, site visits to communities and organizations impacted by the housing crisis, and a town hall meeting.

LA’s town hall meeting was an overwhelming success, with hundreds of low-income and homeless residents packed into the California Endowment to have their stories and conditions documented by the Special Rapporteur. Based on these stories and everything else she saw on her U.S. visit, Ms. Rolnik told the town hall attendees: “I also have seen today, and this evening, a lot of the other side of it. I have seen a lot of struggle against, a lot of organization, a lot of solidarity, a lot of mobilizing, articulating and fighting against. This is the path, and this is the hope that we must have in order to overcome this situation in order to have, for everybody in this country and throughout the world, the right to adequate housing as a human right.”

The Special Rapporteur will prepare a report documenting the entire U.S. visit for the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, including key recommendations for the U.S. government, to be presented in March 2010.

Although this visit and report is just one step toward making the human right to housing a reality, it is a crucial one. LA CAN will continue working with partners locally and nationally to restore housing rights in the United States.

Don't Remind Me of Yesterday!

Don't remind me of yesterday, because yesterday is still here today, in a different disguise and will be here tomorrow, disguised again. Yesterday, today and tomorrow are all the same day, but three different outfits, costumes, masks. Nothing ever changes, just using different approaches to deal with the same situations. Oh! don't remind me of yesterday, that's too close to home, because I'm still dealing with it today, yesterday, still exists today and will be tomorrow too, with a different approach, a different disguise. I'll deal with it again. So don't remind me of yesterday, today, tomorrow. I don't want to talk about it, I'm too busy living it today, yes, living yesterday, today for tomorrow again. Don't remind me of yesterday, I don't want to talk about it, because I got to live it today for tomorrow again. I'm not sad, glad or mad, just don't remind me of yesterday because I'm too busy living it today for tomorrow again.

It wasn't sad, good, bad or happy it's what it is at the time. Time continues, time changes, but yesterday is still today for tomorrow. So don't remind me of yesterday. I'm Busy!

Written by JodyRay

—Ms. Barbara explains to the city official that “they can be nice to you, but they will come with a knife to your back,” metaphorically speaking.

WRITTEN BY: DREA MATTINGLY

Speaking Out: Skid Row Residents

Leading a presentation in a college classroom, Linda Valverde of the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) asked students to describe Skid Row using one word. Students overwhelmingly characterized the community with words such as “prostitution, drug use, mental illness, and homelessness.” Linda said, “Well, I’m here to demystify the myths, because I am a proud community member of seven years in Skid Row. I live AND work in Skid Row.”

Although many characterize the Skid Row community with negative attributes, Linda and many others not only live in Skid Row but are also working to change conditions for themselves and their neighbors. Homelessness has never been a political priority over the last 30 years. There is a myth that people choose to be homeless. There is another myth that there are hundreds of beds available in the missions. More importantly people don’t know how folks actually get into shelters, the long waiting lists, programs being discontinued because of the economic crisis which is now leading to more housing crisis. The issues that Linda raised brought me to LA CAN to learn more.

It is Monday morning. Eight Skid Row residents are gathered around the table at City Hall to oppose the allocation of up to \$20,000,000 in Multifamily Housing Revenue Bonds to the Amerland Company for the Rosslyn Hotel rehabilitation project at 112 W. 5th Street. Among them is Linda. They outnumber the City Hall official and a lobbyist for the developer who is trying to take over the Rosslyn Hotel by petitioning for public funds. This developer, Ruben Islas, also received over 100 million dollars in public financing for two previous projects in the City of Los Angeles: the Alexandria Hotel and the Frontier Hotel (now known as the “Rosslyn Lofts”). The history of those two projects includes:

1. The LA City Attorney filed criminal charges against Amerland Group for fire code violations at both of their properties in April 2008. The violations were later corrected with Amerland pleading no contest to criminal charges.
2. A federal lawsuit was filed against Amerland Group/Logan Property Management by ten current and former Alexandria Hotel tenants in December 2007 due to race and disability discrimination and other illegal business practices. The suit was settled in February 2009 resulting in a \$1,000,000 combined payment among defendants that compensated up to 100 wrongfully displaced tenants and 10 named plaintiffs. The City and CRA/LA (also named in the suit) paid \$450,000 in cash toward the settlement, spent almost \$400,000 dollars in outside legal fees, as well as incurred the legal expenses of the City Attorney’s office.

At the hearing, one-by-one LA CAN members shared their testimonies recounting the inhumane conditions they have endured in Amerland-owned buildings: bug infestations, no running water, and cut-off electricity. The Skid Row community members are on a mission: they have come not as “experts” in public policy, but as “experts” in the problems of poverty who want their voices heard before government officials.

Ms. Barbara, an older woman, speaks out about her experiences as an Alexandria tenant. She warns the city official that “the main problem” is the landlord’s attitude. Ms. Barbara explains to the city official that “they can be nice to you, but they will come with a knife to your back,” metaphorically speaking. Barbara refers to the eviction threats she has received. She also witnesses unidentifiable bugs that crawl everywhere, making some residents break out in hives. She highlights the harassment residents endure from the security guards who patrol the property.

Al, a long time resident of the Rosslyn Hotel targeted for purchase, reiterates many of the concerns Ms. Barbara has highlighted. He describes the residents who signed the petition he distributed in his building. Many of us, he explained, live at our below the poverty level. He collected 96 signatures from his neighbors who opposed the Rosslyn sale. Although residents might be labeled poor, leaders like Al inspire neighbors to sign a petition, demonstrating that they care about issues that affect them.

These are examples that the other students in Linda’s class did not get a chance to see. Al, Ms. Barbara and Linda are examples of Skid Row residents who are on the frontline, fighting on behalf of their community. They understand the pressure residents feel knowing they might end up in the streets. Anyone present in the room at City Hall filled with Skid Row residents would have witnessed their passion and energy. The following week, the City Council did not allow the bond application to go forward, instead they “received and filed” the item. The mission is far from over, but hope remains. Community members like Linda, Al, and Ms. Barbara are driving it forward.

“We come together because we can no longer stay separated by geography, language, income levels, skin color, sex, age or immigration status and idly watch as our communities are torn apart by neglect, greed and gentrification.”

WRITTEN BY: Paul Boden
ARTWORK BY: ERIC DROOKER

Why We Come Together

A story that organizers often hear when they first start working to influence federal politics involves a meeting of civil rights leaders with Lyndon B. Johnson in the oval office. Those were the days before the Voting Rights Act in 1965, and organizers argued that this bill was a moral obligation, no matter the fierce of opposition of southern democrats. LBJ agreed, or so the story goes, and then said: “Make me do it. Go organize your communities so that I have no choice but to do what is right.”

Replace southern democrats with blue dog democrats and it’s the same situation we find ourselves in today. We almost assuredly do have a President who will support our agenda but we also most assuredly know that we are the only ones who can make our agenda a reality in the financially corrupt and morally bankrupt corridors of Washington DC.

January 20, 2010 will mark the one-year anniversary of the Obama administration. While one year is not a lot of time in the four-year life cycle of a Presidential administration, the first year in office pretty much can set the tone for everything that will follow.

The one-year mark then is a very important indicator of how much actual change President Obama was able to create with just the fact that “He Won” and with the people he has brought in. We need to all come together and do some serious evaluation of the pluses, minuses and absences of what has happened thus far. We also need to plan for the fact that regardless of what we might have expected or hoped for, whatever else we may hope to accomplish is only going to come through the sheer determination, skills and energy of no-bullshit, hard-core, locally-based community organizing.

We come together because we can no longer stay separated by geography, language, income levels, skin color, gender, age or immigration status and idly watch as our communities are torn apart by neglect, greed and gentrification. Neglect in LA, greed in Portland and gentrification in San Francisco reflect a universal pattern of oppression: from anti-homeless loitering and sleeping laws to Business Improvement zones in low income neighborhoods to immigration checks at health programs and public schools to arrest histories in Public Housing. ALL low-income, poor and homeless people

are finding themselves being squeezed out of their communities, being squeezed out of society, and being squeezed into jail.

Obviously what we are saying here is nothing new. Communities of poor people pitted against each other for crumbs from the table of bureaucrats, politicians, foundations and the mainstream media is as old as the “War on Poverty” and as pointless as a 35-person, 20-minute meeting with a Mayor, a Governor or the Chief of Police. Our attempts to appeal to the spiritual, moral, or human side of those entities that are controlling our lives, that are demonizing and displacing us from our communities, have been smacked down by the reality that the only church of any real substance in corporate and political (a redundant statement today) circles these days is the “church of the ATM.”

What is new is the dawning of a rejuvenated day in organizing.

No longer will we stick with the *what’s-in-it-for-me* approach to organizing. This has proven to be as ineffective as trying to convince businesses that it will help their profit margin to stop being the ruthless capitalists that they inherently are, or trying to convince a politician that if she or he shows compassion and speaks of the humanity of poor people they will surely get elected.

If a corporation wants to gentrify a neighborhood, or establish a Business Improvement Zone, a meeting on their turf to search for a soul or politely testifying during the two minutes we are each

allotted at a local city council meeting has proven time and time again to do us more harm than good. Aside from being purposely incredibly boring!

If we don’t recognize that each of our individual lives will improve only in proportion to the lives of *everyone* in the community, then to hell with us. Focusing only on I-me-mine organizing in order to build our membership base is a waste of the very valuable time we are quickly running out of.

It’s a new day. From now on, we will make up our own set of rules for community organizing. We will come to the party with the strength that only non-violent, hardcore and-fearless protest can give us.

On January 20, 2010, come join us at the Federal Building in San Francisco. People from up and down the west coast will be coming together to create a new set of rules for community organizing and to plan for America’s next great social justice revolution and party.

If you can’t join us in San Francisco, go to the Federal Building in your community and we’ll figure out a way to all hook up. The only thing that matters is to get together, celebrate our beauty, and create a plan, so that ALL OF US can combine our resources, talents, skills and intelligence to bring about the day when the word entitlement isn’t considered a curse when spoken by poor people, but when housing, education, healthcare and a living income are entitlements for us all.



HOMELESSNESS:

“Knowing that missions do not house, transitional housing is a temporary stay, and a return to the street will soon come...”

WRITTEN BY: JOSEPH THOMAS
ARTWORK BY: UNKNOWN

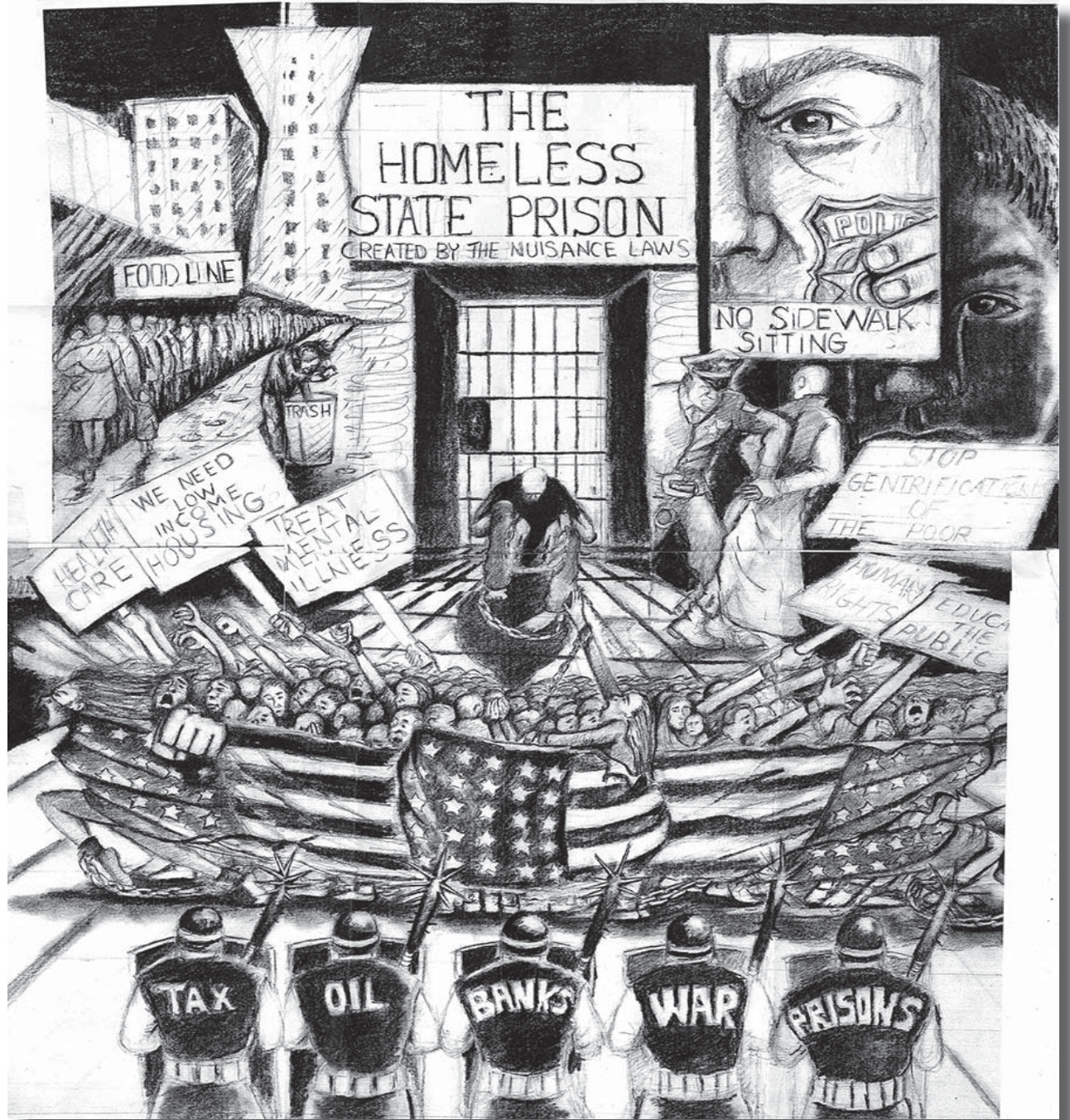
To be homeless is a state of one’s mind and physical being to endure the greatest violation of all human rights. Sleeping on pavements, door ways, benches are all violations of city ordinances, but yet this is all that is left to you and me by those who write these violations. Homelessness is being a pawn for greed -- corporations and the “powers that be” continue to thrive while the state in which we live deteriorates.

City politicians, police and businesses have all written tickets to survive and grasp power off the back of the poor and homeless. In short, us: the black and the brown. Everyone deserves a roof over our head, a pot to cook in, and a bed to sleep in. The city’s, as well as the state’s, answer is incarceration, labor for the state as well as wasted tax dollars. By now everyone knows that like anything else, homelessness is a business constructed by the rich.

Living in the streets, we know that resources don’t exist because 52% of our budget goes to those who incarcerate and violate us to no end. Knowing that missions do not house, transitional housing is a temporary stay, and a return to the street will soon come just because of who I am. There is no employment and to humiliate us in a justifiable way is to issue up \$221.00 a month -- their “solution” to all of our problems.

Because of the city, county, state and federal neglect, we now have insurmountable health issues, we have no nutrition or clothing and in some cases no care for our children. Through homelessness, we now have become soldiers of the war on poverty, or what has become the war on the poor. For me years ago a life in the struggle was the draft and a potential ticket to Vietnam. But now I’ve come to realize from where we sit or stand, that was just the preface of things to come as we live the life of homelessness right now.

So in conclusion, either our so-called city leaders write our tickets to jail or we choose our destiny. Which is it? Homes not jails! Stand up and fight! If not us, then who will it be?



Looking for a Business Venture

There is a new business today
 Contrary to yesterday
 Such is due
 To a growing homeless American crew

They are provided places to brood
 Eat less than nutritional food
 Sleep in areas unfit for people like you
 Become infected by more than just the common flu
 Unrelieved of clothing feelin’ like elmers glue
 All for the monetary value
 Many find easy to pursue

Hey dude! Pew! Know that wasn’t you
 or is it that plastic bag makin’ me gag?
 Is it true this industry will elude
 those who try and do
 something positive, fresh and brand new?

Is this not supposed to be a place of rescue
 and followed there of in lieu?
 Or is this simply a view
 of yet another hard money makin’ American
 issue?

And by the thousands they come
 They used to be called bums
 In this society their main theme
 is anything that can be redeemed:

cans, bottles, plastics and things
 thus the grocery store industry’s shopping
 carts
 makeup a new era vehicle in any park,
 lot and city street

As well there are those who do not or never
 will know
 how to successfully and legally make dough
 Their payday is made by the intense smell
 found
 in a sack of “blunt” by the pound
 Add up these numbers in any mission
 And the problem of ill hygiene is envisioned

Will one find a shower
 as effective as rain is to a fresh spring flower?

Take note of the many beds
 compared to the few toilets and shower heads
 And how putting the health and safety upkeep
 in the hands of those who only use it to sleep
 Finds any shelter’s bathroom and such in
 complete defeat

All this make up the core
 of this warehouse and/or store
 for more than just the ghetto’s poor
 As mentioned before
 a regretful third maybe even fourth American
 civil war.

--Be Bop

--They accused the President and Congress of setting up "death panels" to kill elderly people.

WRITTEN BY: DAVID WAGNER
ARTWORK BY: JOSH MACPHEE

THE BATTLE IN WASHINGTON: WE NEED THE RIGHT TO HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

Almost every country in the world, as different as they are, agree on one thing: health care is a fundamental right that all citizens deserve regardless of their incomes and other positions in life. Meanwhile back in the United States, the lack of health insurance (and very poor insurance coverage as well) leads to serious illnesses going untreated, people going bankrupt, and premature death. Because of this, many Americans were pleased that our new President and the new Congress took up the issue of health care reform this year.

Unfortunately as is almost always the case in politics, what "reform" means is subject to debate; it means different things to different people. Taken off the table rather immediately is the kind of system that prevails in most European countries and even in Canada, in which *health care is a right for all citizens, paid for by government*. Labeled with the dry name "single payer health care," I personally would rename it free health care. We do have free schools. You go to school, whether grade school or

high school, as a right, you do not pay for it. We have rights to such basic things as free libraries, parks, and fire protection. *Health care should be the same way.*

Sadly few people in Congress are fighting for this. Yet the right-wing talk show hosts and Republican politicians decided this summer to yell out "socialism" wherever they could! A government takeover, they said! They used a highly committed group of easily swayed people to disrupt some town hall meetings and demonstrate against the health care reform process. They accused the President and Congress of setting up "death panels" to kill elderly people. It didn't really matter that it wasn't true. They also ignored the fact that 45% of people in the nation already get the dreaded government health care through Medicare, Medicaid, Veterans Services, and other programs.

This was all nonsense, but what is in a way more disturbing to me is the fact that those who have a vested interest in free public health care- poor and working people of our nation- were not out in the streets in large numbers making their views known. Yes, there have been some demonstrations, but sadly the majority of people who are unemployed, who have no health insurance because they work at jobs that provide none, and many of the poor who fall outside of Medicaid are often not represented by anyone. The right-wing zealots like to shout out. The liberals get mad because they say the right-wingers are not civil and they are being dishonest. But until there are large numbers of people affected by our terrible health system that make their own voices loudly heard, we may well stay in the predicament we are in.

As I write, one bill has been reported out of the Senate Finance Committee, and several other bills have passed committees in the House. The Senate Finance Committee bill at this point is so bad that 27 labor unions are taking out an ad out this weekend to

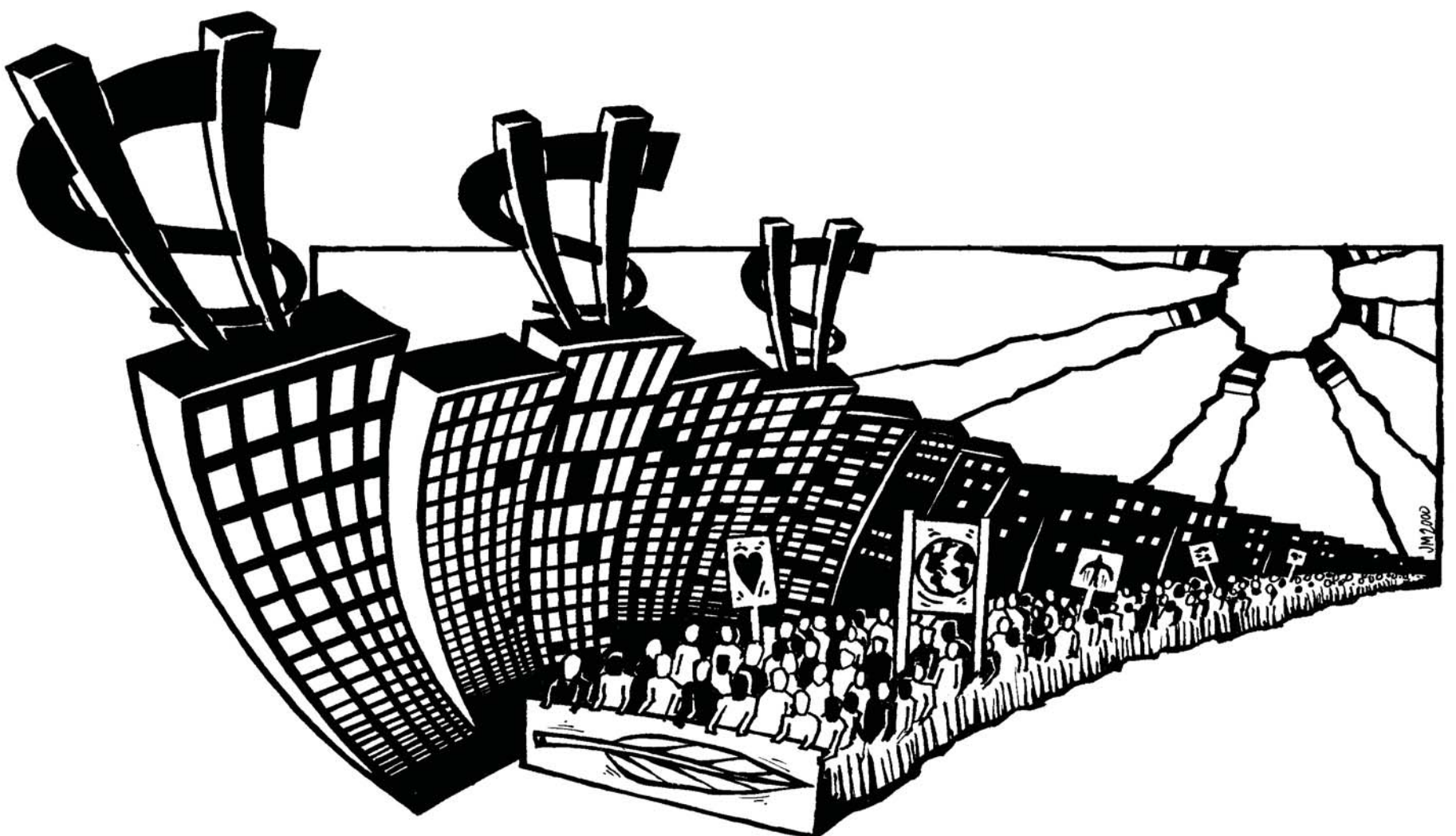
oppose it. The main problem is that the bill will send many millions of new patients into the greedy for-profit insurance companies, and it will do so by *making the consumers pay for it*. Insurance would be mandatory, but not government funded! Moreover, it will be financed by taxes on some people who have health care coverage and cuts to the Medicare program. The plan will help insurers keep their profits up without ensuring a quality health care system.

The House bills have some better options including what has come to be called "the public option" (having government provide health insurance), having more subsidies provided to help people who don't have insurance pay for it, and placing more of the cost on employers rather than on the poor and working people.

Unfortunately, neither President Obama nor the Congressional leaders seem insistent on the basic principles of a right to health care. They have become so committed to "getting something voted out" of Congress this year that it sometimes does not seem as if what that gets voted on matters to them. But we need to be wary—we have seen "reform" before- for example, remember "welfare reform" which cut many people off welfare? "Reform" is not always better because you call something that. It could even be worse. We need to fight for a right to paid health coverage for all Americans regardless of race, class, creed or whether they work or not!!!

David Wagner, Ph. D. is a professor of sociology and social work at the University of Southern Maine and worked with LACAN while in Los Angeles during 2009.

Note: The status of the health care bills has changed since the submission of this article. Readers are encouraged to seek out updates and get involved with the debate.



On January 20, the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) will be gathering at the San Francisco Federal Building to demand the following from the Obama Administration:

ON HOUSING

- Immediately restore all federal government affordable housing program funding to comparable 1978 levels, with an emphasis on HUD's public housing and project-based Section 8, USDA new unit construction and the National Housing Trust Fund program.
- Enact a moratorium on the demolition, conversion or destruction of ANY publicly funded units until federal law guarantees one-for-one replacement at existing affordability rates.
- Ensure adequate funding for operations of public housing to prevent unit loss, high vacancy rates, and substandard living conditions.

ON CIVIL RIGHTS

- Stop police and business improvement zone programs that enforce "nuisance crimes" or "quality of life crimes." These programs criminalize and remove homeless, poor, people of color and disabled members of our communities.
- Call for DOJ to respond to LA community request for investigation of discriminatory police enforcement under the Safer Cities Initiative that targets homeless, poor, people of color and disabled community residents.
- Ensure that the more than 914,000 homeless children in our public schools are able to stay at their "home school," are fully integrated with their housed peers, and are provided the support they need to learn and thrive.
- Stop any and all questions regarding a person's immigration status when they are requesting housing, health care, emergency shelter or services.

*Schedule coming to San Francisco or sign on to the action.
Find out more at www.wrAPHOME.org*

To contact LA CAN or find out more about our work and how to support us write, or visit us online:

530 S. Main Street, Ground Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90013
(213) 228-0024

www.congress.org
WEBSITE

congress.wordpress.org
BLOG

 BECOME A FAN OF LA CAN

 SEND US A TWEET @ LACANetwork

Correction: The Community Connection did not credit Darlene Altemeier Dobbs for use of her artwork which appeared on page 11 of the August-September 2009 edition. *Art Project Gallery* was used in the LA CAN 10-Year anniversary article. We apologize for this oversight.

WHERE'S OUR CHANGE?

STOP CRIMINALIZING POVERTY!
NO MORE HOMELESS DEATHS
HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT!
ARREST POVERTY NOT POOR PEOPLE

01|20|2010
CONVERGE ON THE
SAN FRANCISCO FEDERAL BUILDING

CONTACT US: WWW.WRAPHOME.ORG

Editorial Policy:

The Community Connection is a street newspaper and a member of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers. The Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) is a membership organization comprised of low-income, homeless and formerly homeless residents living in or near downtown Los Angeles. LA CAN's staff and core members, more than 95% of whom live in Skid Row and/or have been homeless, write many articles that appear in the Community Connection. These appear without a byline. Articles by contributors who are not LA CAN core members and/or personal opinion articles receive a byline. These articles do not necessarily represent the views, opinions and perspectives of the Los Angeles Community Action Network.

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