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Take Back the Land Movement



Solidarity Networks

## Thought Centrelink was bad? It's about to get worse..



Plus:

- Solidarity Networks
- Open Letter against Racism Amongst the Class
- Centrelink changes from Assembly for Dignity





## Open Letter to Friends and Comrades on the Struggle against Racism amongst the Class.

Notes in response to the recent anti-burqa protests

After a few years of relative hiatus right-wing populist politics has re-emerged again on the streets of Australian cities. The largest mobilisations of this new born right-wing populism has been seen in protests against the so-called 'Carbon Tax' yet there has been considerably smaller but controversy hungry protest calling for a ban on the burqa and expressing a larger opposition to immigration and refugees under the rhetoric of opposition to Islam and Sharia law. The forms that this right-wing populism takes are pretty sloppy and open ended. Unlike the Joh for PM campaign or Pauline Hanson's One Nation there is no central figure with electoral ambitions that hold them together. In the case of the opposition to the Carbon Tax the Liberal National Coalition has certainly supported to some extent these demonstrations thus perhaps explaining their relative popularity, whilst the opposition to Islam is being organised by much smaller groups and are gathering only handfuls of people. One of the organisations behind these protests the Australian Protectionist Party is a project lead by the old neo-Nazi milieu. The Australian Defence League is a pretty piss poor imitation of the English Defence League; but without similar football casuals in Australia they have not been able to find a similar success. In Brisbane there has been a similar phenomenon in the shape of the Australian Patriots Defence Movement. Unsurprisingly there has been a mobilisation of Left and progressive opposition to these groups and rallies, but are the tactics and the thinking behind them actually usefully to produce a free and just society? What is the nature of this new right-wing populism and what is the best way to oppose it?

### Fascism/Anti-Fascism

The opposition to the ADL and the APDM often sees them as being forms of fascism, comparable to the National Front or National Action. Undoubtedly there are white supremacists and possible ex-members of fascist groups that hang around these milieus (though notable overt neo-Nazis oppose them due to their pro-Israel stance and their use of opposition to anti-Semitism to frame their anti-Islamic politics). The classic strategy used against fascisms is one of direct confrontation. The NF and NA were militant and violent formations and opposition had to confront them on the streets often physically to deny them space to organise. They had clearly fascist and racist politics and were making serious inroads (the NF at least, NA was always a bit shit) in various white working class communities hit by the collapse of social democracy and Fordism. However the Left opposition thought of the fascists of the '70s (and I heard this analysis during the opposition to Pauline Hanson) as being sociologically similar to the fascism of the '30s – largely a middle class movement. Caught between big labour and big capital they were supposedly the little shop owner with dreams of being Fuehrer. This had a political effect – as being seen as exterior to the working class there was no point talking to them.



They were an enemy to be smashed. However those who spent the most time confronting fascists in England from the '70s on often argued that fascism was developing a working class base and need to be confronted politically (hence the formation of organisations such as the Independent Working Class Association).

The ADL and the APDM are not fascists and should not be thought of as such. The APDM has not produced much in the way of public statements of their politics beyond their website statement. It is pretty classic right-wing populism with some weirdness about taxation and currency, demands to try "traitors" and an understanding of the separation of powers which actually doesn't fit well with the Australian version of the Westminster system in which legislative and executive power overlap – as the cabinet is composed of people from parliament. But over half the document is focused on banning the burqa, and this is certainly what is the main point. So what is this all about?

The spokesman of the APDM Darren "Beatle Bailey" Morris is almost a Basil Faulty like character. His speeches and writings are a stream of self-aggrandisement and paranoia. Almost obsessed with talking about gays and lesbian and paedophilia he struggles to stay on script but rather veers off on numerous tangents, makes wild claims as "FACT!", and veers between claiming he is being silenced and threatening violence through his connections with outlaw bikie gangs and ex-army personnel. His speeches are a stream of right-wing nuttury where he often states that for reasons of tactics the APDM need to shed the racist image and then stating he is happy to be labelled one. But it is not clear that many, if any, of the other APDM leadership nor the handfuls of people they mobilise shares such views. In my conversations with them at the rally and reading what many write on Facebook most have various oppositions to what they perceive as elements of the Islamic faith and various cultural practices. Most perceived themselves as being anti-racists and pro-immigration 'if they assimilate' and seem otherwise politically pretty reasonable: they display a mixture of social democratic and liberal ideas that make up the common sense ideology of contemporary Australia. A quick Facebook stalk shows that most have

have friends and family of many ethnicities and interests in culture and music that would enrage your standard neo-Nazi. Even Scott Neale, one of the other key organisers, was pretty reasonable in person.

Now of course the views expressed by the APDM can be and should be seen as forms of bigotry. They are based on a wild series of claims that essentialise Muslims as some unified global conspiracy theory. It is important to challenge these ideas. But the tactics that the Left used during the counter-demo in Brisbane, tactics of shouty confrontation premised on silencing the APDM (based on seeing them as fascists) were not very effective or productive.

## Racism

Racism is structural in society and the globe. The history of capitalism has been a history of producing global populations and resistance to this process. This has created complex hierarchies of power amongst the global population and multiple complex lines of identity and belonging. Global capitalism relies on a global workforce and this workforce (and those who were discarded yesterday or might be used tomorrow) is organised through these divisions. Capitalism commonly malfunctions and is riven with crisis. This throws millions of people into movement. Tensions in society around immigration and cultural clashes are often produced by these dynamics and are used by both the system as a whole and by crafty politicians and media personalities to create their careers.

Many people understand the problems of capitalist society as not originating from within it but a problem that comes from without. Thus if you look at the rhetoric that appears on the Facebook pages of those who support this reactionary populism you find an understanding of the collapse of social democracy where immigrants are seen as the cause: there isn't enough money for hospitals because refugees get all the money etc.

Equally the positive vision of this rhetoric speaks to people's desire for community – but expressed through a lens of identity. In this sense this reactionary politics shares something with progressive identity politics – a positive vision of community is only imaginable through uniting those who share some common denominator (in this case being “Aussies”) and excluding those who don't share this denominator to a sufficient degree.

Thus what animates the appeal of at least some of the rhetoric of the ADL/APDM is an understanding that society is deeply unfair and a desire for community. My essential point is to say we should support these intuitions whilst arguing that the forms of their expression and the world view they are crafted in is wrong.

Obviously all this is very complex. I suspect that the APDM expresses a particularly Australian series of paranoias. This is a fear of the world. It is obvious to anyone that things are difficult and challenging in the world we live in. Ten years of a supposed “war on terror”, three years of economic crisis, ecological problems and an impression of general global violence, dislocation and decay. Australia's social democratic inheritance



**RECLAIM & DECOLONISE**

and the mining boom have shielded the Australian economy somewhat, and the high work, higher credit, high consumption deal capital has offered has allowed a high material standard of living – yet a stressful and insecure seeming life. Immigration and refugees in particular become symbols of the chaos of the rest of the world imposing onto the relative tranquility in Australia. There is a form of social-psychological transference where worries about the condition of the world, conscious or not, become associated with migration. The mobilisations of the ADL and APDM are a kind of ineffectual acting out of these paranoias. (That said much of the behaviour of the Left is also an ineffectual acting out which compensates for the Left's actual inability to transform society at the root – 20 APDM protestors become substitutes for an unequal society.)

Racisms and bigotries are objectionable on a purely intellectual basis- they stand in contradiction to any concept of human equality. They also work to mystify and obscure an understanding of the actual sources of the problems we face. Racisms and bigotries (as well as a host of other ideologies) displace the blame for the crises and exploitation of capitalism onto others in the social hierarchy who also suffer from it. Thus these ideologies need to be challenged as part of the struggle to transform society.

Revolutionaries want to contribute to the development of a real movement to transform society. This involves challenging the ideas that dominate society and mystify it. We want to do this and do it well. The tactics that the Left displayed in opposing the APDM in Brisbane aren't helpful. The shouting and confrontational tactics only confirm the Left's own illusions – it neither unsettles the reactionary ideas nor convinces passers-by.

A far more effective strategy would be an attempt to create debate and spread ideas in a manner that is humourous, good-natured and endearing. Part of this should be aimed at those who have come along for the rally but don't form the ADL/APDM hard-core. It is important to remember no one has ever had their ideas changed by being yelled at. Rather it is important to be straightforward and fair. Listen to what they are saying, take their ideas seriously, and present yours in an open and calm manner. On the Saturday rally I found

that most of the APDM people wanted to talk, wanted to argue about the world. As revolutionaries we should support debate within the class even when the ideas expressed are wrong. Too many people have a life of being told constantly that they are wrong, that they are idiots, to shut up. Part of what revolutionaries should be doing is creating spaces within the class where debates happen, and seriously listen to what people are saying. If we have confidence in our own ideas why should we be afraid of arguing out in the open?

What ideas should we argue, what points should we try to make? Since this right-wing populism is based on strange and weird clichés about Muslims the first response seems to just disprove these claims. That is important work and should be done. I am unsure how effective this argument is. What might be a better strategy is to make an argument – both through conversations, through openly debating their spokespeople, and through leaflets distributed at the rally – that whatever one thinks of any religion the demand to ban the burqa is a demand for the state to have the power to tell people how to dress and thus undermines everyone's freedom. Many of the people I talked to felt that there was an injustice that hoodies couldn't be worn in shops in Wynnun so it is unfair that people can wear burqas. The appropriate response seems to be to argue that people should be free to wear whatever they want. A defence of religious freedom and the secular nature of society undercuts much of their argument and seemed to be listened to.

The more serious argument is to say that this is a non-issue and a distraction from the real problems in the world. The insecurity these people feel is real, the causes they attribute it to are wrong. The real problems come from a world organised on the endless accumulation of value. Finding a way to say this in a clear yet thorough way is a necessary challenge.

Ultimately the best way to challenge racism is to build collective struggles that challenge capitalism on the terrain of our daily lives, that build common bonds of solidarity that unite people. Racism will be made irrelevant rather than 'smashed'. The most effective way to defeat racism is to build a real class movement, to build a common project and an open community as we transform daily conditions. Many people are trying different ways to do this yet none of us can claim to have found 'the answer' with any real confidence. However the dominant form of Left intervention – shrill moralism – seems unlikely to be a useful as a way to talk with, to listen to and work together with those around us. I was very lucky to spend many years in Wollongong and witness excellent long term militants organise in their communities.

What was so remarkable about these comrades was how much they cared for people as real humans. Political debates they had carried weight because they have weight in their communities.

The dominant ideas of our society, its ideological common-sense, are some mix of social democracy and liberalism with a heavy nationalist and racialised content. How are we going to argue these ideas with people that we want to work with, that express elements of these views?

Will we just yell racist at them? How will we contribute to a mass, popular, social movement to change our society if we can't win the debate?

At the moment the ADL/APDM remain minuscule manifestations of ideas that are common through the society – and the above strategy is premised on this. If a genuine fascist street movement arose then of course other tactics would be necessary.





## Thought Centrelink was Bad? It's about to get Worse..

Also the criteria for being put on the DSP are being restricted.

### Intensive Obligations for the Long Term Unemployed.

If you have spent two years in employment services then you will be required to undergo "intensive obligations". This includes having to do 2 days of work experience a week for 11 months a year.

### Participation Plans for Parents.

New Participation plans for teenage parents mean that they will have to finish year 12 or equivalent and those families that have kids under six (and neither parent is employed) will also have to make and stick to participation plans. The details of all this are scarce but it doesn't look good.

The following is extracted from the recent Forum by *Assembly for Dignity*: "*Thought Centrelink was Bad? It's about to get worse*

**So that's the total picture of the changes**, which I think are massive. You can see the multiple different levels that are going through. Some of it involves quarantining in specific areas: we'll see how that's being rolled out. The other is a kind of like salami divide up - we'll see what's going to happen. It's probably worth while thinking about why this is happening - why are these changes going through - and they're quite different from other massive changes that have happened in the past. And it helps to work out why these are going through because the government tells you themselves why they're doing this in the budget:

### Boom Mark II

So the Australian economy is going through something at the moment that's called 'Boom Mark II' - which is the resources boom. What's happening at the moment is that the price of the stuff were digging out of the ground in Western Australia and some parts of Queensland is at a record high. We dig it out of the ground - particularly gas/steel coal or whatever - we dig it out of the ground and we sell it to India and China. And they've got 8% growth so their economies are rocketing at the moment and because there's not many people digging the stuff out of the ground so the price is really high.

Now this Boom Mark II is causing problems for the Australian economy. In the language that they use we're reaching 'full capacity' which means that unemployment is so low that people who are looking for work can demand relatively high wages. So there's a worry that those sections of the economy that aren't linked to mining - the retail industry and the rest - can't offer the wages there had been to keep people going. This is also linked with a very funny thing that the government is worried about called the Dutch Disease.

### The Dutch Disease

Now the Dutch Disease is apparently what happened to Holland in the 70s when they were selling a lot of oil from the North Sea. When you dig a lot of stuff out of the ground and you sell it at high commodity prices the value of your dollar rockets up. Which means if you're doing other things in the economy it becomes really really difficult. So if you're a manufacturer at the moment in Australia its tough - the Aussie dollar is up its relay hard to make something and sell it - if you're running a shop your labour costs go up and there's a worry that when this boom ends and the federal government says - look really - mid term view the boom's over, so mid term the boom is 4-5 years something like that - when the boom ends the rest of the economy doesn't pick up - the business has ended. So there's this worry about this idea of the Dutch Disease.

And so what does this all mean? It means Capital is struggling to find people to work at the rate that it wants. It's worried about problems in the economy and the stat federal government is looking around and saying where is there a lack of participation - so they look at people who are not classically seen as being in that element - people on welfare that are looking for work - people on DSP, parents, 'disengaged youth' etc. And they're looking at these groups and saying how can we squeeze these people to fill the gaps in and get them into the gaps in the economy. To get them into these sections and to compel them to train. Now I'm not convinced that this will work. But what it will mean is that people's lives will become increasingly difficult. For a huge range of people that are on welfare the requirements that you are going to have to meet are going to be intensified and the power that the State has over your life is also going to be intensified. So in short that's what the welfare changes in total look like at the moment



### Dissenterlink

/Assembly for Dignity is a network looking at the changes and how we can organise against them, with groups in Brisbane and Canberra. Brisbane group meet most Mondays, email for details!



For more details check out the full forum transcript, available at: [www.assemblyfordignity.wordpress.com](http://www.assemblyfordignity.wordpress.com) or email us at [bsn@riseup.net](mailto:bsn@riseup.net) for postal copies.

## SOLIDARITY NETWORKS

### An Introduction to Solidarity Networks Adapted from SeaSol's 'Why you should start a solidarity network'

**When I first became interested in radical politics, there weren't many groups for me to get involved with. All of the collectives I joined seemed to form, fall apart, and reform - always the same people reshuffling into new groups, disbanding, and starting over again. If they took part in any discernible action at all, it was normally because some other group had organised it.**

There is, however, a way to get around these issues: with perseverance and a little bit of elbow grease, you can start your own solidarity network. Although by no means does this model offer the only solutions to these common problems, the solidarity network model, nonetheless, does offer some practical insights and examples of how we can:

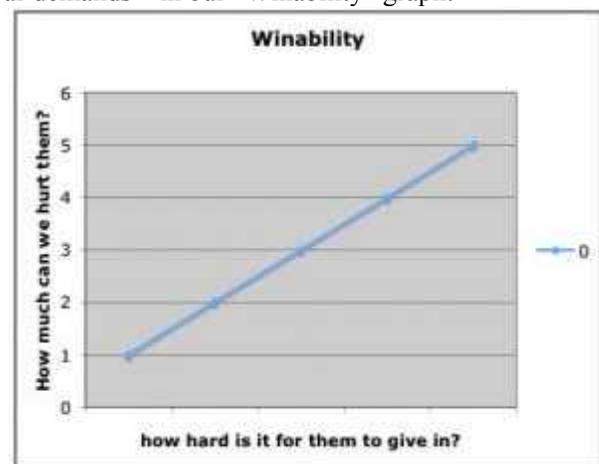
1. Win fights against oppressive institutions, bosses and landlords
2. Attract new workers to our organizations, many of whom will have never even heard of anarcho-syndicalist tactics before,
3. Empower ourselves and our fellow workers and community members, and
4. Establish a stable and positive presence in our community, off of which we may continue to grow in new directions and imagine better horizons. This is key in that the *content* of what we label a 'solidarity network', unlike many other forms of organizing, has the *potential* to build counter-power.

### Winning the fight

*Although it is imperative to defend past concessions and gains (courts etc) fighting on this terrain doesn't have any prefigurative or transformative content. It's alienating, boring, slow, expensive and requires us to become specialists able to provide representation and advice to lay workers. Using direct action allows us to get new people involved, ideally including mates of the person in dispute etc, and give people (including ourselves) a sense of the collective power we have when we take direct action together. If we are dedicated to transformation new forms of organising have to start somewhere. If you go through the courts, then the law defines the limit of what you can achieve. You're literally fighting for "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work" on terms defined by the bosses. The character of your activity is very conservative. If you use direct action based on workers' solidarity, then the limit of what you can achieve is defined by the balance of class forces. You're fighting on your own terms, on the basis of "an injury to one is an injury to all". The character of your activity is prefigurative and potentially revolutionary.*

For those of us who have poured our hearts into a lot of "symbolic" anarchist projects - a lot of anti-police brutality work, anti-war organizing, anti-G8 campaigns, and so on - for those of us who have spent time around these campaigns, we have often felt extremely demoralized. We have felt this way because despite all the sacrifice, we never won anything. The campaigns never seemed to end after the enemy had conceded something; instead they always seemed to stop when people just became exhausted. Because of this, the SeaSol model stresses that organizers should have both a good understanding of how to take on bosses and landlords (what tactics work, what don't), and also on how realistic winning a potential new campaign could be.

We like to show this relationship – between our strength and our demands – in our “Winability” graph:



In the graph we can see that as our demands on a boss become greater, it becomes necessary for us to find more leverage. So, the smaller the demand, the less leverage we need. The bigger the demand... you get the idea. There needs to be a staged escalation giving them an opportunity to nip pickets in the bud, and giving us the opportunity to win with minimal commitment of resources.

*After all – we're not against individual landlords or bosses because they are bad people per se – they occupy a class position in society which reinforces and perpetuates dehumanising social relationships for all of us.*

You might think this sounds obvious, and to those familiar with anarcho-syndicalist ideas it probably is. This graph is just a nerdy way of teaching people a concept Anarchists have always deeply appreciated – direct action.

Part of what makes Solidarity Networks so effective is that we base our actions on our actual strength. If, for example, it was going to take us “5 units” of pressure to win a demand from a boss, but we could only reliably keep up “3 units,” we would decline to take on that fight. Of course, there is no way to quantify any of this, but you understand the concept.

The idea, in a nutshell, is to make sure that we aren't ever spending time on fights we are not yet strong enough to win. By choosing fights carefully, we can focus our energy

energy somewhere we can have a bigger impact. As the base for self-organisation and direct action grows, so does our ability to imagine greater struggles and alternative futures.

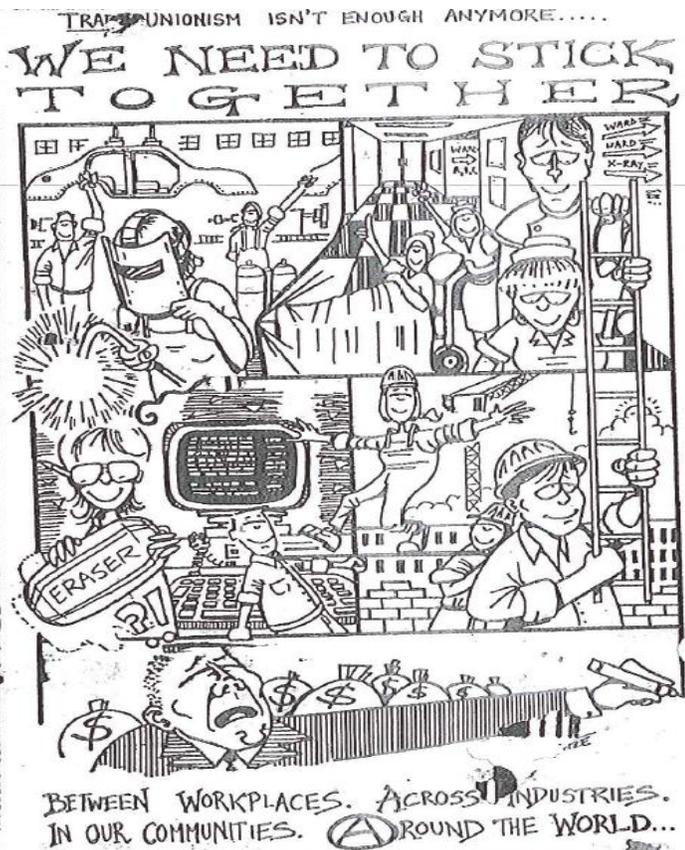
Once the fight is underway, SeaSol uses two basic principals to plan the campaign: escalation and sustainability.

First, we brainstorm what tactics might be effective in the campaign, and we rate them from least to most powerful. We do this because we want to escalate as the fight goes on. "Its not the memory of what we did to them yesterday that will make the bosses give in," explains a SeaSol organizer, "but the fear of what we will do to them tomorrow."

The process of mapping out a fight in this way is helpful not only because it allows us see just how much support we will have to mobilize - its helpful also because it allows us to see if our initial plans are sustainable.

*One of the reasons SeaSol has had more sustained growth than any other Anarchist organization in the Northwest over the last two years is that it offers something practical and concrete to people: mutual support, community, and a real, practical action. What's more, the retention of new members has also been helped along by our momentum: there is always enough work to go around.*

No matter how involved someone wants to get initially, we can always find space for them to come lend a hand. When we attract new people through our ongoing fights and new campaigns, we are increasing our capacity, which means we can take on more fights, thus attracting yet more people. "Empowerment" is a term bandied about a lot in radical circles.



"We need to empower them and empower them..." It can, at times, be used so often it becomes meaningless.

Even if the people involved in SeaSol are not ready to become full on organizers, the experience of taking on a boss and winning can still be a very radicalizing experience. It increases not just our power, but our confidence in ourselves.

*Beyond propaganda, Seeing direct action/class struggle in action is in my opinion more convincing than the best written article or pamphlet read in a vacuum. That is to say it's in the context of class struggles that revolutionary ideas appear as 'common sense' (solidarity, self-organisation, class conflict, a world without agencies, bosses etc would be better...) as opposed to abstractions.*

*The campaigns we conduct concretely show us all the real class divisions rife in our society, with workers on one side, and the bosses, landlords, cops and courts on the other. Arguably, the fights we conduct are able to reach many people in a way that our extensive libraries cannot.*

*In the end, the Solidarity Network model is just a beginning to something we all hope will be something much broader, and more encompassing. With a larger network - and the community of struggle it builds - new possibilities become apparent to us. People have pitched ideas about the Seattle Solidarity Network taking on fights around police brutality, around violence against the LGBTQ community, or even around a case of abuse at a local high school. These are all legitimate fights we may well be capable of dealing with. The point is, this model offers the chance to build a foundation for greater things down the line.*

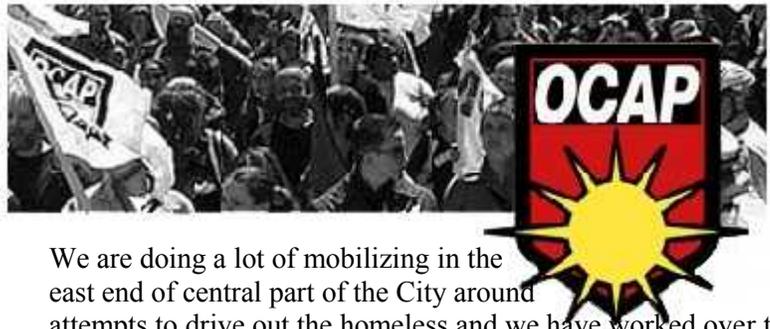
**DENIED BOND?**  
**UNFAIRLY FIRED?**  
**PLACE INFESTED?**  
**REFUSED REPAIRS?**  
**UNPAID WAGES?**  
**UNFAIR TREATMENT FROM A BOSS OR LANDLORD?**

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## Justice, Dignity, Resistance: An Interview with John from Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP)



**Could you tell us a bit about yourself and how you became involved with OCAP?**

I was a worker at a factory in Ontario in the 1980s and, after being made unemployed, I helped form a union of the unemployed. In 1990, this organization helped out in the campaign that led to the formation of OCAP.

I was laid off from the London Westinghouse Plant (Ontario) in '82 and a group of us in the union Local formed an unemployed committee. We tried encouraging others in unions to do the same but opted in the end for a city wide meeting to set up an unemployed union. It's first campaign was to shut down a business called Job Mart that was selling people info on jobs that were available in the newspapers. We picketed them until they folded up. We then focused on the regressive local welfare system and were able to win quite a lot of positive changes in their policies and halved the rate of denials for financial assistance. We then focused on a call for an increase in provincial welfare rates and it was at this time that OCAP was formed. The London organisation carried on until about 1993 when illness among several of its leading members made the work too hard for them.

**What's OCAP ?**

OCAP is a militant, direct-action, anti-poverty organization based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. We mount campaigns against regressive government policies as they affect poor and working people. In 1989, people in various cities worked to organize a three pronged march on the Ontario Legislature. Three groups of marchers each spent two weeks on the road coming into the Provincial Capital from three different directions. OCAP came out of this march. Soon after we were formed, we realized that the best tactic was to focus our efforts on organizing in the biggest centre, Toronto and we are still mainly based here with allies in other cities we work with. We don't have a strict system of membership but hold meetings every two weeks that are open to all who are interested. Outside of this decision making system, we have a much broader periphery of people in low income communities who support and participate in what we do. Our meetings usually involve about thirty core members and our base of active supporters is in the hundreds.

We are doing a lot of mobilizing in the east end of central part of the City around attempts to drive out the homeless and we have worked over the last few years on a campaign to access a benefit known as the Special Diet. This provides up to \$250 a month more to a person on social assistance if a medical provider fills in a form. It has been something we have really mobilized and fought for taking it from, in 2005, a \$6 million a year benefit to a \$200 million one. The Government at present has announced the elimination of the Special Diet and we are launching a big fight to defend it.

The Special Diet and the fight around the homeless are examples of long term work but we have had our share of experiments that we could not carry through on. We always decide on actions at our meetings and plan outreach campaigns in poor communities. We hold special meetings to plan our major actions with people being given particular roles

**How do you begin with solidarity actions and opposing regressive measures? Tell us a bit about the 'Housing Takeover' actions.**

I can think of a few things. First of all, we do a lot of case actions to challenge individual denials and abuses. The system hurts people not only through its policies but the way the local offices act to deny and abuse people. The second example is the concept we have of 'full entitlement' out of which the fight for the Special Diet came. That is to say we work to ensure that people are aware of and assisted in obtaining the things they are entitled to but don't get without a fight. Part of that is the casework but we have also pressed for rule changes. For example, there use to be a rule for people on disability benefits that, if they got more than 120 hours work in one month, they would be cut of and have to reapply for long term disability which takes months. We got that abolished. The biggest change we are up against is the 55% loss of spending power for welfare in 15 yrs. Our fight on the Special Diet took that on but, as the attack on welfare merges with broader attacks on public services, we are starting to get more allies. With the Canadian Union of Public Employees, we are talking about holding meeting across Ontario to try and set up Raise the Rates Committees. I think the fights in the next few years will be much bigger and important than those that have happened up to now. We do do casework but always try to avoid the appeal procedures laid down by the system. We use 'mass delegations' to welfare offices and such like to resolve these things. It really does build us a base in poor communities because we are

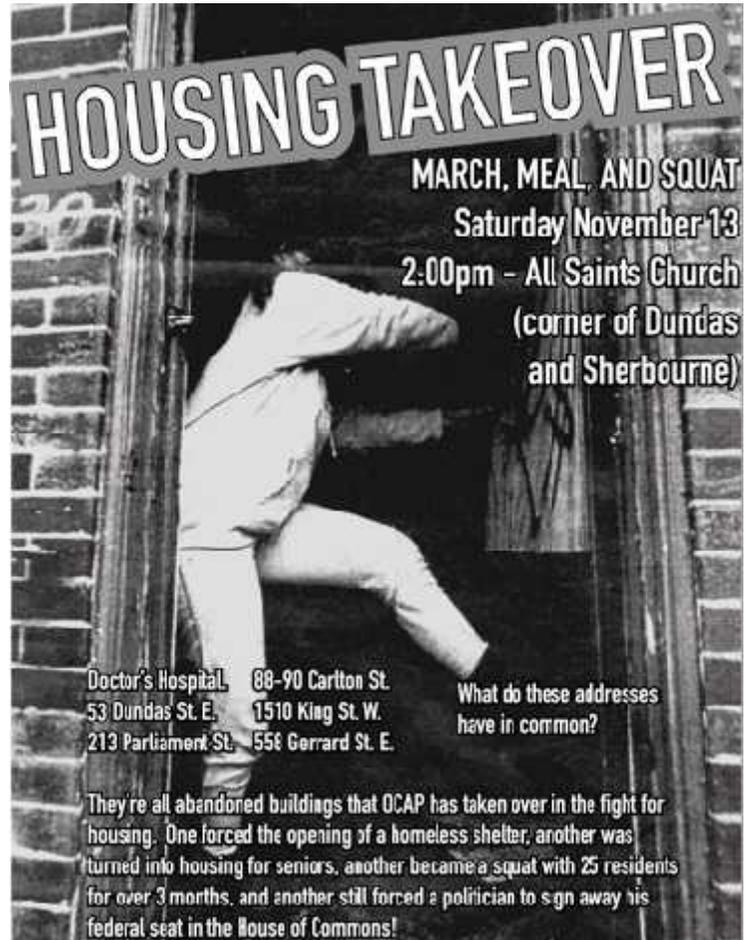
We use 'mass delegations' to welfare offices and such like to resolve these things. It really does build us a base in poor communities because we are defending people and winning small but clear victories that give people a sense of power and hope. We do outreach in poor communities and use various methods to promote our actions and meetings. We have a big e mail list that lots of poor people access. Even homeless people, often have e mail that they access through the libraries. We poster and leaflet poor areas, drop ins, shelters, etc. The key thing, though, is that we have taken years to build up a reputation that makes this outreach count. People know we have taken up their fights and want to support us. Without this, it would probably not have the same effect.

We have tried housing takeovers. It's tough here because there are no squatters' rights at all. If you take over an empty building, the cops treat it like any act of entering private property without permission. We have won a few things, for example, we had a building occupied for about six months. Another big building which we occupied [through pressure] was also converted into social housing.

We have done a lot of work on solidarity with First Peoples. Much of our work around homeless issues in Toronto deals with indigenous People. We have an especially strong link with the activists in the Mohawk Nation and have done a great deal supporting and participating with the takeover of stolen land in Caledonia by the Six nations People. The Mohawks, especially, have returned our support a thousand times over. At many of our rallies, they have gone out and hunted to supply to food and, when we have taken people to actions at the National Capital in Ottawa, they have put us up and fed us on their reserve. We support the First Nations people because they are massively affected by poverty issues but, more fundamentally because, like Australia, Canada is a settler state that exists on stolen land. We owe a debt of solidarity to those who have been robbed in this way.

### **What response do you get from the broader community?**

Deep seated and backward ideas about the poor are real but we actually find we have a lot of respect in the general working class population. Whenever we take actions that make it into the public eye (even if the media coverage is bad) garner lots of support and donations. We've faced our share of attacks, especially from police. We've had major trials in court and done some time in jail. We try to defend ourselves in a serious way in these situations but make sure we don't get so focused on legal defense we stop moving forward with our work.



### **WHATEVER IT TAKES!**

**The direct action casework that OCAP does is conducted with an understanding of three principles. These are:**

- 1. To combine legal work with disruptive action.**
- 2. Not to duplicate the work of legal clinics or other agencies.**
- 3. To forward political goals but never compromise the interests of those you are working with in the process**

**1. To combine legal work with disruptive action:** This means having an understanding of what people are entitled to under the law, and at the same time realizing that poor people have power in disruptive action. By taking on the cases of people who are not receiving all the benefits they are entitled to under the law you create a legal backing to your demands. By combining law with disruptive action you bring teeth to those demands.

Landlords, bosses and government bureaucrats break the rules all the time at the cost of the poor. They often do this unchallenged. The official channels of appeal that are available are often lengthy, costly and ineffective. Direct action casework is designed to cut through this to get people what they deserve.

Workers have the power of going on strike. They have a power that comes from withdrawing their labour and suspending their participation in the system. But if

poor people simply stop participating in the system it gains them no power at all. If some one stops participating in welfare for example, it benefits the government because they have to cough up less cash. Instead poor people need to disrupt the regular functioning of the system in order to secure power. Keeping business as usual is very important to the functioning of many institutions; it is often easier for them to make a concession than to function while disruptions are taking place. Our success comes from demanding people receive what they legitimately deserve under the law and backing it up with disruptive action.

**2. Not to duplicate the work of legal clinics or other agencies:** There are numerous legal clinics and agencies that are given money (usually from the government) to fight on people's behalf or provide them with services. At the same time there are numerous gaps where these groups can't or aren't providing people with the help they deserve. By doing direct action casework you are able to fill some of these gaps. One example is with welfare. A legal clinic can make an appeal if some one is unfairly turned down, but they do so completely by the book, and the process takes weeks to months and no money is necessarily available to the family during that time. The appeal process concentrates power in the hands of bureaucracies. It is a biased process that can't be counted on. The process is designed to discourage people from pursuing what they are due. It is important not to duplicate the work of legal clinics or other agencies. You could easily get bogged down with work that others are capable of, and funded to do. Instead know what services are provided in your region, so you can refer people to them. Many times the people who approach us have exhausted all official legal channels.

**3. To forward political goals but never compromise the interests of those you are working with in the process:** Whenever you take on a case, make it political. You are obviously doing it to aid those who approached you. But you are also protesting an unjust system. Forwarding political goals should be done wherever possible. But it should never compromise the interest of those you are working with. After several years of consistently confronting welfare offices, we have built to a point where welfare offices know to respond promptly and favorably when OCAP letterhead comes through the fax machine.

Case work is extremely effective; but we realize that just doing casework isn't enough. It only benefits a small fraction of those affected by unjust policies. We need to not just fight for those wronged by the system but also fight to change those systems. Campaign work is not as consistently and clearly effective as casework, but with out campaign work we would be little more than a service organization.

## Types of casework

OCAP takes on a various sorts of cases. We started by taking on Welfare (Ontario Works) and Disability (Ontario Disabilities Support Program) cases. Welfare offices in Toronto are now so familiar with OCAP, and we have caused them such disruption in the past, that responding favorably to a letter from us is written right into their policy. But if ever our demands are not met we hold disruptive actions at their offices, and escalate with further actions until a check is secured; however these escalations are most often not needed. Many people staying at Hostels (shelters) experience many horrendous situations and injustices. We have done cases around individuals who get banned from hostels for swearing or those who have had their belongings confiscated by hostel staff. One of the problems with this sort of casework is that once individuals have been barred from hostels and are staying on the streets it becomes quite difficult to track them down for any action that happens. Tenant cases are often fought through legal action at the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal, but we are able to compliment that work through disruptive actions at landlord offices. One time when a landlord was threatening to illegally evict a tenant we changed the locks in order to provide a sufficient delay.

Immigration casework can be a long process and requires a good understanding of immigration law. The way we work is by utilizing any remaining legal channels, and use disruptive action of Immigration Canada offices and institutions to speed up these processes, or to demand that bureaucrats stay (delay) deportations until all legal appeals have been heard. These cases can take many months or years. Any one who is interested in taking on immigration casework should understand the serious commitment that is required. You should consider getting in touch with OCAP's immigration committee to find out more. In the past we have carried out some cases in defense of non-unionized workers. When one man worked for 5 days at a gas station, only to be told at the end of that time that he was not going to be paid, OCAP set up a picket line to discourage cars from attending this gas station, within hours they had agreed to pay him for his work. OCAP has by no means taken direct action casework to its limits. Other groups are building on our work and taking it up in other areas. The "Tenant Action Group" in Belleville has successfully used direct action casework to fight against Hydro cut-offs. The Montreal group "No One Is Illegal" has been pushing Immigration case work to new limits - instead of fighting for and with individuals or individual families, they are fighting for and with whole communities at once.



## AN INTERVIEW WITH ROB ROBINSON FROM PICTURE THE HOMELESS / TAKE BACK THE LAND MOVEMENT



***Could you tell us a bit about yourself and how you became involved with Picture the Homeless?***

No problem. I became involved with Picture the Homeless after spending 10 months in a NYC shelter. I was advocating within that shelter for better maintenance conditions, adherence to rules and better food. The director advised me to take my work to a higher level and I joined something called the New York City Coalition for the Continuum of Care (NYCCCoC). This group makes up 33% of the vote on how some 60-80 million USD are spent on homeless services. Picture the Homeless had access to the email list of (NYCCCoC) and I started to receive emails about the work they were doing. I showed up at a housing meeting in November 2006, liked what I heard and became a member.

I became homeless in July 2001 after transferring from a job in New York City (NYC) which I worked for 13 years. I was given the opportunity to transfer from NYC to Miami Florida to become a project manager overseeing the installation of computer software. I moved from NYC to Miami in March 2001 and by July 2001, four months later I was laid off. I was told "there is no money in the budget for your position". I tried to give Miami a chance and after two years found myself with no job, an empty bank account and no income. I was homeless in Miami for two years before returning to NYC.

***Could you tell us a bit about Picture the Homeless and the Take Back the Land Movement?***

**“Squat on public land, to build housing for our own community. No government permission or money. We are liberating the land for our people.”**

Picture the Homeless is an organization founded on the principle that in order to end homelessness, people who are homeless must become an organized, effective force for systemic change. We have a track record of developing leadership among homeless people to impact policies and systems that affect their lives and our efforts have created space for homeless people, and their agenda, within the broader movement. We were founded by two homeless men in the Fall of 1999. The catalyst for our founding was an urgent need to respond to the Giuliani administration's policy of criminalizing homeless people, broadly supported by the media. The co-founders of Picture the Homeless (PTH) began reaching out to allies for support, a place to meet and to figure out strategies to create an organization of homeless people that could carry out this work. In January 2000, PTH held its first organizing meeting. Picture the Homeless has since worked to develop an organization directed and run by homeless people by building an infrastructure that keeps organizational decision-making in the hands of homeless people.

I am a member of the Land & Housing Action Group/Steering Committee of Take Back the Land. I consider Max Rameau of Take Back the Land in Miami to be a friend, mentor and confidant. He has taught me so much. In September 2009, several of us met in Atlanta Georgia and formed the Take Back the Land National Movement. The Take Back the Land Movement is directly challenging those laws which allow banks to reap record profits while millions of families face eviction and homelessness. Challenging unjust laws requires a protracted direct action campaign of civil disobedience designed to prioritize people over profits in a tangible way. Local campaigns and actions are not directed by a centralized committee, but entirely driven by Local Action Groups (LAG), who operate autonomously and operate large scale in a federated manner. This body is known as the Land and Housing Action Group (L&HAG). In cooperation with the US Human Rights Network the L&HAG facilitates communication among the LAGs and provides them with campaign and technical support. This decentralized network model focuses power, flexibility and decision making in the hands of local impacted communities and individuals.

Take back the land models itself off the MST Landless Peasants Movement in Brazil, and the Abahlali baseMjondolo land movement in Africa. *Take Back the Land* is a comprehensive campaign initiative, which includes a direct action campaign and the grassroots initiative to build alternative institutions, such as land trusts, co-operatives, and other collective ownership and management vehicles to exercise direct community control over land and housing.

**Abahlali baseMjondolo**, the name is isiZulu for 'people that stay in shacks', is a South African social movement of poor, mainly African people centred around the city of Durban. The movement formed after shack dwellers at Kennedy Road blocked a major road for four hours and held it against the police in protest at the sale of a piece of land that had long been promised to the community for housing. The movement now has tens of thousands of members in over 40 settlements. The movement has around 10,000 paid-up members and more than 30,000 active supporters in over 40 affiliated settlements. They have recently formed a national alliance (The Poor People's Alliance) with Anti-Eviction Campaign in Cape Town, Landless People's Movement in Johannesburg and the Rural and Farm Dwellers Network.

Abahlali meetings are usually attended by around 30-40 mandated delegates from settlement development committees as well as local settlement residents. Decisions are made by consensus if possible, and by vote if not. Large decisions are referred back to local settlement committees for further discussion, and representative also report back on the meeting to their local community. AbM selects office holders at branch, settlement and movement level through open elections at annual assemblies. Office holders are recallable, rotated, and mandated to act on specific issues at open weekly meetings. Office holders are not elected to make decisions but to ensure democratic process on matters relating to the issues. Ethically, it is part of the prefigurative politics that allow a hermeneutic circle between means and ends. This is the reason for ideological fluidity. As the situation changes over time, ideas, goals and tactics will need to be re-evaluated in order to remain relevant and effective.

Abahlali is an intellectually, and ethically, serious project. Meetings are thoughtful, democratic and consensus based. All night 'camps' are held every quarter for members to plan, think and strengthen their solidarity. Mass meetings are characterised by a presentation of the situation and issues from key figures in the community development committee and the movement and then debate from the floor.

Abahlali are resolute in their refusal to allow themselves to be co-opted by the government or anyone else. The movement rejects party politics, politicians and NGOs that 'want to use the poor as ladders'. Everybody thinks. We are poor, not stupid. Planning must not just be a technical talk that excludes the people. Democracy is not just about voting. Democratic planning is the way forward.

#### **Libertarian-communism (From an Abahlali communiqué)**

We are for a living communism. We are for a communism that emerges from the struggles of ordinary people and which is shaped and owned by ordinary people. We are for a communism built from the ground up. We are for a communism in which land and wealth are shared and managed democratically. Any party or groupuscule or NGO that declares from above that it is the vanguard of the people's struggles and that the people must therefore accept their authority is the enemy of the people's struggles. Leadership is earned and is never permanent. It can never be declared from above. It only lasts for as long as communities of struggle decide to invest their hope in particular structures. Often there are many legitimate and democratic structures involved in the same broad movement of struggle at the same time. This is why we always insist that the autonomy of all democratic poor people's organisations must be respected and welcomed.

#### **The MST *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra***

Since 1997 hundreds of thousands of landless peasants have banded together and occupied over 200 stretches of unused land in Brazil under the banner of the MST 'Landless Workers Movement'. In addition, 140,000 families have been resettled on



on land following direct action over the past 10 years. During the early 2000s, in addition to occupying derelict farms, Latifundo - vast landowning owned by absentee landlords and public buildings, the movement has also invaded and despoiled functioning properties owned by large corporations whose activities it considers to be at variance with the principle of environmental sustainability and the social function of property.

"If you are poor, it is because someone is exploiting you. Brazil is a very rich country, and there should be a place in it for everyone...If you vote, you change nothing. We could have Jesus Christ as president, and he'd still have to do all the deals that politicians do. He would still not be in control. Unless the people can start to do things for themselves, and unless we can change our way of seeing things, nothing will change in Brazil or anywhere."

Early 2010 **Take Back the Land** delegates went to Africa with the following objectives:

#### **Build an International Movement**

We seek to realize housing as a basic necessity for every person on this planet.

As such, we seek to establish formal relationships with organizations fighting for these gains, thereby building an international movement for community control over land and housing.

#### **Campaign Modeling.**

The WCAEC and AbM have executed mass campaigns to stop bulldozers and evictions. We in the US have much to learn from our sisters and brothers across the globe.

#### **Network Modeling.**

South Africans have built a national anti-eviction and land movement. Take Back the Land strives to learn from their model and replicate their successes.

**The *Take Back the Land* campaign is rooted in the following principles:**

- Housing as a Human Right.
- Land and adequate housing should not be commodities to enrich the elite but instead, like air, should be protected as a common good.
- Local Community Control over Housing.
- Leadership by Impacted Communities, particularly low-income Black women.
- Direct Action..

The Take Back the Land Movement and the live-in campaigns, however, encompass more than merely disobeying immoral laws: it is fundamentally about empowering communities to take control of their land and implementing the moral imperative of housing human beings. More than simple civil disobedience, the live-in campaign is, in fact, a movement of moral obedience. For example On October 23, 2006, members of Take Back The Land reclaimed publicly owned land in the Liberty City section of Miami, creating the community town of Umoja Village. With the defence and help of the community, supporters built temporary housing units for 53 displaced residents.

**Foreclosure Related Evictions:**

In the context of the millions of families across the country homeless and under-housed, continued foreclosure and demolition related evictions, of owners or renters in houses, apartments or public housing, is counter productive. We must put an end to foreclosure related evictions through campaigns of community and home defenses.

**Foreclosed Homes:**

After a vicious cycle of gentrification, which escalated housing prices and forced the removal of entire historical communities in the name of development, the foreclosure crisis has reached epidemic proportions. Perfectly good homes sit vacant, for years on end, the property of banks that already have been paid for them by the federal bailout. These homes must be filled with families in need of housing.

**Vacant Buildings:**

As the homeless sleep in the streets, cars and parks, vacant buildings, owned by banks and local governments, dot the urban skyline and shock the moral conscience. These structures must be put to use for the benefit of people in need of housing.

**Vacant Land:**

During the housing “boom,” local governments made publicly owned land available to politically connected developers at fire sale prices. Now that boom times are over, vacant land must now be returned to use for public housing and other public goods.

**Public Housing:**

Even as the housing crisis intensifies, municipalities across the country are shedding public housing units through demolition, deliberate vacancy and privatization. In this time of great need, we cannot afford to lose one inch low-income housing. Public housing must be put to its intended use and controlled by residents and local communities.

**Right to Return:**

Whether through gentrification, public housing demolition or the combination of natural disasters and government actions,

those forced to leave their long-time communities must have the right to return.

**News of Picture the Homeless reached us through the New York tent city action. What did this involve and what did you get out of it?**

The tent city action was done for several reasons. To highlight the large amount of vacant land a property being held by landlords merely, for speculation. On a daily basis 38,000 people sleep in NYC homeless shelters. That piece of land was vacant for over 20 years. It was also owned by JP Morgan Chase which received government funding to prevent it from failing. Our question is, our tax money is used to prevent a bank from failing but those same banks are foreclosing on Americans an evicting them from homes? This is a contradiction we wanted to highlight. It is also why I am so passionate about Take Back the Land. The only social change that has happened in America has happened as a result of direct action or civil disobedience. That is the foundation of Take Back the Land.

**Could you tell us about other campaigns Picture the Homeless has engaged in and what's planned for the future?**

We have a campaign led by homeless leaders who refuse to stay in shelters - our position is that if you lose your housing and choose to live in public spaces, your constitutional and human rights should not be abused by the police! We fight to end selective enforcement of Quality of Life regulations -- "Whose Quality of Life" is improved by moving homeless people from public spaces? We fight the lack of legal representation for homeless people, pressured to plead guilty instead of exercising their right to trial, and forced to return to court over and over if they choose to not plead guilty. We are also working to ensure that homeless New Yorkers' right to vote is protected, including in city jails. The Civil Rights Committee is currently engaged in a campaign against Disorderly Conduct. The police use “Disorderly Conduct” to arrest or ticket homeless people – a key tool in the criminalization, profiling, and harassment of the homeless. We believe that the NYPD should be required to specify one’s alleged violation rather than charge behind the vagueness of ‘Disorderly Conduct’. We demand that ‘Dis Con’ be clearly recognized in practice as a non-arrestable offense. We are currently gathering surveys and testimonies from homeless New Yorkers to build this campaign, and possibly file a lawsuit against the NYPD. This campaign also engages in Know Your Rights and CopWatch workshops. Our goal is to equip homeless New Yorkers with tools that they need to defend themselves and their community from harmful and unjust police abuses.

We have..

- Just won a major victory against the NYPD in federal court resulting in the issuance of a groundbreaking policy directive against selective enforcement of the law by Homeless Outreach Unit and Transit Police and created the first legal clinic for homeless people to address Quality of Life tickets and police harassment in partnership with NYC Police Watch;
- Forced the NYC Department of Corrections to allow interfaith services for homeless and poor New Yorkers buried in Potters Field 6 times per year – which had previously been off limits for friends and extended families of New Yorkers buried in mass graves;
- Won the support of the Center for Constitutional Rights, Coalition for the Homeless and Union Theological Seminary to develop a legal defense clinic for homeless people being ticketed for Quality of Life offenses
- Begun collaboration with the Urban Justice Center to analyze data from over 200 in depth surveys conducted by civil rights committee members of homeless New Yorkers experience with policing entities. We anticipate that a major civil rights report will be released in late 2005 or early 2006
- Expanded our civic participation and homeless voting rights project, hiring 7 leaders who have collectively designed and are delivering workshops in shelters and soup kitchens;
- Held an action in support of the free speech rights of panhandlers around Yankee Stadium resulting in (at least) a decrease in harassment by police from the local precinct;
- Will begin later this month working with the newly formed city wide anti police brutality collective that includes groups working in the LGBT and racial justice communities;
- Provided Know Your Rights Trainings at Queers for Economic Justice

We also have a Campaign called Potter's Field where NYC buried nameless homeless people in mass graves. It happens on an island run by the Corrections Department. Friends and people who cared were never allowed to visit until Picture the Homeless pressured the city to open up the island.



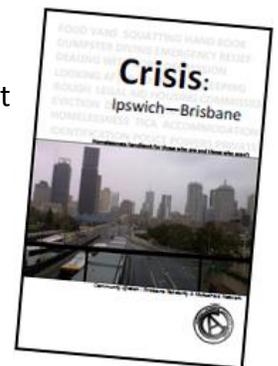
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MORE INFO?

[HTTP://WWW.SOLNET.CO.NR](http://www.solnet.co.nr)



For more info see <http://takebacktheland.org/>

## An Interview with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW): Starbucks Workers Syndicate (IU-660)

Early 2011 Baristas are putting up pressure on Starbucks Corp. to come to terms with 200 unionized workers in Chile who have been on strike for more than two weeks. Employees who belong to the IWW Starbucks Workers Union kicked off a "global week of action" on Monday in solidarity with their Chilean colleagues by picketing in front of a Starbucks in New York City. The following is a short interview with one IWW organiser.

**Could you tell us a bit about yourself and how you came to be involved with the IWW?**

I became a Starbucks barista in 2007 because my other retail job didn't pay me enough money to live. I looked at other companies and remembered that Starbucks had a great reputation for being good to its workers. Once I started working there, I found this not to be the reality in my case. I was verbally abused by shift supervisors while my pay was abysmal at \$7.60 an hour. We also were an extremely busy store at the Mall of America and were frequently understaffed during brutal rush periods and many times we were sent home when the sales didn't meet the projections, making us short on hours. When a fellow worker asked to meet with me outside of work, I was hesitant, but I attended a meeting to find out what he had to say. As it turned out, I was not alone with my misery, other baristas were unhappy too. Many of us were so poor, we were living off of day old sandwiches (mark outs) because we didn't make enough money and our tips were abysmal at the mall. In addition, one of my fellow workers was being targeted for firing. I was initially on the fence about becoming involved and was initially turned off by the use of the "U" word, but when they fired my fellow worker, I became angry. They used an excuse that he "discussed disciplinary action with a co-worker" as a reason to terminate him, a blatant violation of our right to organize. It was a clear injustice, so I hopped off the fence and, very quickly, we went public as the first union store in Minnesota.

**Starbucks has gained a reputation for its aggressive tactics, for example in union busting and saturating areas with their stores - (this is something that backfired here in 2008). Could you give us a overview of the events and disputes that led to the organising and formation of the IWW Starbucks workers union?**

The Starbucks Workers Union began in New York City and spread to other cities Like Chicago and Grand Rapids, Michigan. New York baristas have special problems involving life in a busy, crowded and extremely expensive city, so one of their demands was a living wage. While they did not achieve a living wage



by NYC standards, their demands caused Starbucks to raise wages in the city by one dollar an hour. There are so many issues to organize around so I won't mention all of them here, but I will tell you why we organized at our particular store.

1-Illegal firings such as FW Erik Forman's dismissal for "Discussing disciplinary action with another employee." Other employees that were on the fence about joining the union would get fired sometimes for minor lateness infractions and there was not much we could do to help them as they didn't have the few legal protections that union members enjoy.

2- Unsafe working conditions. At the mall we did not have an operational air conditioning system. Our manager claimed that he couldn't get a fan that complied with some law, so we suffered in those conditions for a year and a half until we took direct action and left the store to buy a fan on our own. (The next day, the bosses bought an industrial \$300+ dollar fan for us, possibly to avoid further direct action.)

3- Inadequate pay. We calculated that in the Twin Cities, a living wage is approximately \$13 an hour. At \$7.60 an hour we were basically having to work all of our waking hours just to afford the basics.

**Anything you'd like to add for readers or struggling baristas?**

Starbucks has a highly organised union busting force in place. That said, they have never understood anarcho-syndicalist tactics and solidarity unionism – and the fact that there is no one leader that they could fire or intimidate out of the picture that would cause the union to capitulate. We are all potential leaders. Another huge challenge is the fact that retail jobs are very low wage jobs and have a high turnover. That can make it hard because there is a constant rebuilding process going on as workers rotate to new jobs or back to university.

Don't stay on the fence! Joining the union has been one of the best decisions I have ever made. Though I personally am not at Starbucks anymore, I am still involved with the campaign and carry IWW membership anywhere I go. Remember when you are struggling, you have solidarity not just in your local chapter, but around the world.

## Direct Action Gets the Goods: An Interview with **SEATTLE SOLIDARITY NETWORK**

**Could you tell us a bit about yourself and how you became involved with SEASOL?**

Note that I'm not speaking for the organisation, just as an individual participant. I personally got involved as one of the five Wobblies (IWW members) who started SeaSol at the end of 2007. I had been a believer in anarcho-syndicalism since my early teens. I had spent three years in Montreal among radical activists during early 2000's, when a lot was happening, e.g. the Quebec City demonstrations and strong anarchist and student movements growing in the wake of that. Then back home in North Carolina, I had been involved in fairly radical 'minority union' activity with a union called UE, organizing with fellow state employees, from cleaners and mechanics to secretaries and nurses. From that experience I got a strong sense of the potential and need for worker organizing beyond the boundaries of standard unionism. After I moved to Seattle in late 2005, I gradually found a small group of like-minded Wobblies who wanted to make something happen, so we started meeting and discussing ideas, and in winter 2007/2008 SeaSol was born.

**What's Seasol's about? Could you give us an overview of how actions are organised?**

Seasol is a network of volunteers, open to workers employed and unemployed, active and retired, who believe in building solidarity, standing up for our rights and improving our conditions. We don't have formal membership, but our action-announcement email list currently has 300 people; our phone tree has about 120 people; and our organising committee is 11 people. Each week someone volunteers for 'secretary duty', which means they take responsibility for handling the calls that week. We operate on very little money. We just don't need much. We have no paid staff.

When SeaSol is first approached by someone with a conflict or grievance, two or three of our more active volunteers (which we call 'organizers') set up a meeting with them, usually at a coffee shop. At that meeting we listen to the story, clarify what the problem is and what the demands might be, explain the basics of how SeaSol works, and find out if the person or people we're talking to would want to join with SeaSol in fighting for their demands. We also mention that we would like for them to be willing to stay in touch with SeaSol (i.e. be on our phone tree) and participate in future actions in support of other workers and tenants. SeaSol then makes a democratic decision about whether or not we are going to take on this particular fight. This can happen either by

### **SOLIDARITY STOPS SLUMLORD RETALIATION:**



Loren Ruud was my landlord. The apartment had bedbugs in it. I tried to get rid of them, I bombed it three times, but I couldn't get rid of them. It was an old apartment. The place wasn't up to code. It was terrible. I had to call a crisis hotline. I also had to call the housing authority, because the apartment had bedbugs, it had an unsecured door, and it had dry rot in the kitchen. And as soon as Ruud found out that I had called the city, he came up to my place on Thanksgiving with no notice, and threatened to evict me.

The housing inspectors rescinded the ten-day notice, since Ruud was trying to retaliate against me. They decided that I should vacate by December 20th and the landlord should pay me \$1,000. I vacated December 17th. I left the place clean and tidy. Then Ruud decided to come after me for \$1800 in "damages to the apartment". I called my friend Nohl, and he told me what he knew about Seattle Solidarity. He had gotten one of their flyers at the Martin Luther King Jr day march. I called Seasol, left a long message, and sent an email, and then I met with Kaleen, Lee and Ryan at Bedlam Coffee.

We delivered a demand letter to Ruud, saying: rescind the charges of \$1800, don't send it to collections, and "leave John alone." We waited two weeks, and there was no response to the letter. Then we decided to poster the place. The posters said "Beware: do not rent from 9632 Aurora Ave N - environmental sickness, bedbugs, dry rot..." The strategy was to let the people in the area know about the conditions in those apartments, and that the landlord steals deposits and rents out substandard housing. On a Thursday, one week after posterizing in Loren Ruud's neighborhood, he called me and said "please stop what you're doing. If you and Seattle Solidarity stop your actions against me, I will not send the \$1800 to collections." And we agreed. And that was it. The corporations don't want to pay out anything to workers, and the landlords don't want to pay to maintain apartments, so they're trying to pass all the costs onto their tenants. There's a great need for Seattle Solidarity. In me, they now have a good volunteer.

vote at our weekly meeting, or between meetings via our '24-hour rule'. The '24-hour rule' is sort of a passive consensus process for quick decisions between meetings. One of the organizers emails all the others and says "I propose that we agree to get involved in this fight." If none of the others expresses disagreement within the next 24 hours, then the proposal is considered passed. There's more to this process and to the 'organizer' role that might be worth explaining/discussing, but for now I won't bore you with any more details on this.

- After we've decided to get involved in a particular conflict, then whenever possible the planning and decision-making for the action campaign takes place within our regular weekly meetings. We often do 'break-out' sessions within our meetings, where the meeting splits up into 2 or 3 groups for 30 minutes or so, to carry out the detailed planning for multiple fights and/or other projects, and then we reassemble so each sub-group can report back, and take votes if there are things that need to be decided by the group as a whole.

Our first action is almost always a demand-delivery action. A group of people, usually somewhere between 10 and 30 (or as many as we can muster) goes to confront the employer/landlord in person, and their employee[s]/tenant[s] hands them a piece of paper that spells out the demand. The demand letter usually includes a time limit for meeting our demands, after which we will take further action. It also includes our web address, so they can see what kinds of things are likely to happen if they don't give in. Once the demand has been delivered and we've taken some photos, we leave.

Then we start planning an ongoing series of actions aimed at pressuring the employer/landlord, usually by hurting their business, until the demands are met. Sometimes we picket, with "Don't shop here" signs. A few times we stood outside a restaurant and gave out coupons for a nearby competitor. Sometimes we cause social embarrassment by visiting all their neighbors and distributing flyers where they live. Or we pressure other businesses/institutions into cutting ties with them. Sometimes we spread information online and with posters to warn tenants not to rent from a particular landlord. Or we visit all the tenants and encourage them to file a barrage of complaints about health violations. Twice we've had groups of tenants who were facing eviction, and we helped organize them to form a pact and announce that none of them would leave the place (i.e. the landlord would have to go through the lengthy and costly process of forcibly evicting every one of them) until all of them received money from the landlord to help them get a new place. Once we continually pressed the pedestrian "cross" button and kept slowly crossing and re-crossing the street to create a big traffic jam at the entrance to a supermarket parking lot. These are just some examples. They come up with tactics that cause the most possible harm to the employer/landlord with the least harm/risk to our people.

## Has SEASOL ever experienced violent attacks from landlords or bosses? How are police and other groups dealt with?

We've only ever experienced threats and very minor violence. I once got a threatening anonymous email, where a slumlord had paid for a little 'background investigation' on me and included a bunch of semi-accurate personal info to scare me. Once we had threats that a worker would get jumped if we kept picketing. We kept picketing, but took care to make sure we had a sizable group and stayed together at all times. Another time someone snatched and broke some of our picket signs. We started taking pictures of the guy (a young manager-in-training) and he ran away.

The cops often get called to our actions (the bosses call them), but so far we have generally stayed within the letter of the law, and we've been able to persuade the cops to leave us alone. We always delegate one person to be the 'cop-talker' for the action, which helps prevent unnecessary trouble. Cops are always more comfortable if they think the group they're dealing with has a leader, so we let them imagine the 'cop-talker' is our leader, when in fact they have no more authority than anyone else. Staying within the law is a strategic/tactical decision for us, given our current weakness.



For more information see SeaSol's pamphlet "How to Build a Solidarity Network" and "Why you should start a Solidarity Network", available on our network's website. To keep up with solidarity network updates and actions in Brisbane send an email to [bsn@riseup.net](mailto:bsn@riseup.net) for more on SeaSol visit <http://www.seasol.net> Also check out SeaSol's intro video on youtube

# UPCOMING EVENTS/AUTONOMOUS ACTIVITY AROUND BRISBANE

## NOAM CHOMSKY IN AUSTRALIA

### - SYDNEY PEACE PRIZE LECTURE

Wednesday, November 2 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Sydney Town Hall

### - MELBOURNE FREE PUBLIC LECTURE

Noam Chomsky will present a lecture 'Changing Contours of Global Order' at Deakin University. To be held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre on Friday, 4 November 2011.

Time: 7.30pm.

## OCCUPY BRISBANE PUBLIC MEETING

Occupy Brisbane meeting is set for Sunday October 16<sup>th</sup> - Queen's Park opposite Treasury Casino (George & Elizabeth Streets Brisbane) 3-5pm

## BRISBANE RADICAL SOCIAL HOUSING FORUM

The next social housing forum will be on the 5th of November, 2:00pm @ Bulimba Library. Featuring stalls from radical housing projects as well as open discussion on alternatives to the landlord-tenant relationship.

## PARADIGM SHIFT RADICAL RADIO

Tune in to **4zZz** (102.1 FM) Friday's from 12:00 - 1pm

**Anarchy Show** → Mondays 12:00-1pm

## BIZOO ZINE FAIR

Bizoo are putting on a zine fair to celebrate the launch of their retrospective book. Bizoo was a political/music/arts zine that released 25 issues over a 5 year period between 2001 - 2006. The fair is being held in the 4zZzfm car park (St Pauls Terrace Fortitude Valley) on the 8th of October from 10:30 - 2:30 bands starting 3pm.

## WAITERS UNION COMMUNITY ORIENTATION COURSE

Held midyear (June/July), and again at the end of the year (early December). Course includes personal reflection, group process, cooperative/community organising, whole-hearted, holistic engagement, cross-cultural dialogue and practical solidarity: [waitersunion.org](http://waitersunion.org).

## FOOD NOT BOMBS

Intercept the gross cycle of waste, raise awareness and challenge the misallocation of resources under capitalism. 'People's Park' on Boundary Street West End, opposite the Lizard statue every Friday night. Serving 6:30pm till 9pm. Cooking starts 3:30/4 at the Waiters Union Kitchen at 69 Thomas Street West End.

## TURNSTYLE SOCIAL CENTRE

10-12 Laura St, Highgate Hill. Open from noon, Turnstyle is a collectively run social space that provides resources for people and groups working on projects that benefit the community and/or for activist social change. The resources of the space include a meeting, presentation and event space; radical library; a bicycle workshop; home brew kitchen; a cob oven bakery; and art and prop-making space.

## DISSENTERLINK / ASSEMBLY FOR DIGNITY

Meet most Mondays 6pm at Checocho Café (69 Hardgrave Road West End) to keep an eye on the welfare changes and organise against them. For more info see: [assemblyfordignity.wordpress.com](http://assemblyfordignity.wordpress.com)

## PLANS FOR LAND AND FREEDOM

Radical community course looking at themes of self-management, mutual-aid and self reliance. Drawing from personal experience over 30 years in the Back To The Land Projects and Counter Events in North East Australia 1980—2010 Phone: 07 3275 1119 [www.cdiq.org.au](http://www.cdiq.org.au)

## Continued from inside cover...

• **Direct Action:** Capitalist society is not a debating chamber based on rational arguments, but *rather a power struggle between different groups and classes with opposing interests*. Direct action means to struggle independently without intermediaries – it means winning gains from a position of power rather than through relying on the ballot box or appeals to political or economic representatives. Direct action means organising in a way that fosters confidence and self-activity and includes everything from occupations, strikes (general or otherwise), sabotage, economic blockades and boycotts, to disruptive action, grassroots education and distributing material. It means fighting to improve our conditions while at the same time prefiguring (that is, embodying aspects of) the alternative types of social relationships we want to see. It means to contribute towards rebellious practices, experiments, cultures of hospitality and solidarity, spaces and structures of co-operation, self-education and self-rule – to have both a foot in this world and to step into one that we want. We call this 'dual power' – *Building the new world in the shell of the old*.

So in this issue we're looking at Solidarity Networks – what are Solidarity Networks? The 'Solidarity network' is one way of organising which has the potential for dual power. In a nutshell, they are networks which span across different communities and different workplaces (regardless of unions or not), in order to support and connect struggles and build collective action. The principles behind solidarity networks rely on the balance of class forces, and recognise that sometimes we have to fight defensively because as a class we are weak, and this can't be compensated for by small group actions 'attacking' back in whatever way (e.g. networks don't firebomb dodgy real estates, they organise tenants to collectively assert their needs, even if that's only defensively enforcing basic standards, because this builds the capacity, confidence and culture from which more ambitious demands can be made.) Networks try to bring anyone affected by an issue together to collectively discuss the issue. The key is the self-activity of all of those concerned, to widen the fight, and encourage a state of permanent dialogue, planting the seeds for ongoing, relevant forms of organising which empower all of those affected; not just network members, but those who aren't members of the network and who may never want to be.

*Meaningful action, for us is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the people and whatever assists in society's demystification. Sterile and harmful action is whatever reinforces the passivity of people - our apathy, our cynicism, our differentiation through hierarchy, our alienation, our dependence on others to do things for us and the degree to which we can therefore be manipulated by others – even by those allegedly acting on our behalf.*