

**ŽIŽEK ON IRAN • GRANNY GET YOUR GUN**

AUGUST 2009

# IN THESE TIMES

**Will Obama help  
Troy Davis?**

**Sewer Socialism  
down the drain**

## TAKING THE HEAT

**Can America's poor survive  
the Climate Gap?**

**BY MICHELLE CHEN**

**PLUS:**

**David Moberg on the legacy of the  
Republic Windows and Doors sit-in**

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# mixed reaction

## JUST THE FACTS



**150,000** Annual death toll in low-income countries due to disease, flooding and crop failure caused by global warming

**77** Percentage of Latinos in California's agricultural sector workforce

**1.9** Projected annual cost, in trillions of dollars, of climate change impacts by the year 2100

**14** Projected average temperature increase in Chicago by 2100

“ England has done one thing; it has invented and established public opinion, which is an attempt to organize the ignorance of the community, and to elevate it to the dignity of physical force.

—OSCAR WILDE IN *THE CRITIC AS ARTIST* (1888)

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



## QUID PRO QUO

### THE QUID:

Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) is enjoying the benefits of health and wealth. She has received more than \$1.5 million in donations from the healthcare industry since being elected to Congress in 1992. DaVita Inc., a health services enterprise and one of her donors, contributed \$171,250 in the last three election cycles to three other senators who sit on the Senate Finance Committee, which oversees healthcare reform.

### THE QUO:

When asked about proposals for re-vamping the healthcare system, she told the *Arkansas Times*, "My concerns that I've expressed is that it's got to be one that works on a level playing field." A public option like that proposed by President Obama, she said, would offer "very little incentive for the private industry to be able to be competitive." One wonders why a low-cost, government-funded



insurance plan would not encourage competition. But perhaps true competition is the last thing Lincoln's supporters in the healthcare cartel want.

# contents

VOLUME 33 - NUMBER 08



## FEATURES

- 15 FALLING THROUGH THE CLIMATE GAP**  
Poor Americans will suffer most from global warming  
BY MICHELLE CHEN
- 18 IRAN ON THE BRINK**  
Warning to the Persian cat: Don't look down!  
BY SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK
- 20 POWER OF THE PEOPLE**  
In the long run, Iranian civil society will triumph  
BY AARON RHODES
- 22 HOME SWEET SKID ROW**  
Poor Los Angelenos fight for their neighborhood  
BY DAVID WAGNER
- 24 NOT YOUR PARENTS' LABOR MOVEMENT**  
Why the Republic sit-in failed to inspire other worker actions  
BY DAVID MOBERG
- 26 WE'RE PUBLIC ... NO, WE'RE PRIVATE**  
Charter school corporations take on public school teachers  
BY MICHAEL KLONSKY

## VIEWS

- 8 HEALTH & SCIENCE**  
Zicam: Homeopathy fails the sniff test  
BY TERRY J. ALLEN
- 9 VIEWPOINT**  
The GOP's democracy double standard  
BY JAMES THINDWA

## FRONTLINE

- 10 YOUR CRAP, OUR COMPOST**  
Squat and the earth shall grow  
BY SISI TANG
- ALSO:**
- Granny get your gun
  - Budgets by the people
  - Sewer Socialism down the drain?
- 11 APPALL-O-METER**  
BY DAVE MULCAHEY

## CULTURE

- 30 WHY DAVID SOMETIMES WINS**  
Marshall Ganz's new book examines the parallels between Cesar Chavez and Barack Obama  
BY ETHAN PORTER
- ALSO:**
- Outtakes of Africa
  - Queer prehistory
- 34 EXCERPT**  
*Pre-Gay L.A.: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights*
- 36 THE POOP ON POPULATION**  
The dirty truth about diapers  
BY LISA MANTERFIELD
- 28 MY BROTHER ON DEATH ROW**  
Troy Davis' sister speaks out  
BY ALICE KIM

## Block 'Em, Sock 'Em

**A**CROSS THE COUNTRY progressive groups are mobilizing to support legislative initiatives, but to what effect?

On the climate change front, the Sierra Club heralds the American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACES) that passed the House and is now in the Senate as “a great step forward for a clean energy future in the U.S.” The group notes that the legislation needs to be strengthened by the Senate. How the more conservative Senate, America’s House of Lords, will do anything other than muck up the bill remains unclear.

Americans for Financial Reform, a national coalition of more than 200 state and local organizations, has come together to reform and regulate the banking system. “Our principles will only prevail if the voices of the public are heard over those of bankers, traders, mortgage brokers and their armies of lobbyists,” says Heather Booth, the group’s executive director.

Health Care for America Now (HCAN), a mega-coalition of progressive groups, is promoting a 10-point set of healthcare reforms, one of which is “a public health insurance plan that guarantees affordable coverage without a private insurer middleman.”

These campaigns, though different in focus, are similar in that they urge constituents to pressure their elected representatives. But is there any bite behind the bark? Unless progressives can back up their demands with credible and specific threats, why should Democrats fear their displeasure?

Take healthcare reform. If Congressional legislation doesn’t contain a public option, is it worth supporting at all? Where is the line in the sand? What price should Democratic elected officials pay for fealty to the healthcare industry?

The senior manager of health policy for

the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, James Gelfand, believes he has Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), chair of the Senate Finance Committee, in his pocket. He told *Kaiser Health News*, “Instead of focusing on the 90 percent of issues that everyone can agree on, we’re getting stuck on the 10 percent ideological, uncompromisable, unworkable provisions ... like creating a government-run insurance plan.” Gelfand said that the Chamber will “try to work especially with Sen. Baucus to fix this thing.”

“I’m sorry that things have gotten to the point where we’re having to beat up on members of Congress who are proposing wacky schemes instead of pragmatic legislation,” says Gelfand.

That sounds mean. The nice folks in the progressive nonprofit world would never threaten to “beat up on” Democratic members of Congress. But maybe that’s the problem.

A bright spot in the otherwise dismal Democratic landscape is the emergence of what is being called the Progressive Block strategy, championed by the blogger Chris Bowers of the website Open Left. The Progressive Block would involve a critical number of progressive lawmakers—at least 13 senators and 45 representatives—joining Republicans to vote down Democratic legislation that does not include desired progressive provisions. Thanks to the likelihood of such a block emerging, Speaker Nancy Pelosi has said that any healthcare reform that lacks a public option will not pass the House.

The possibility of Democratic nays defeating Democratic legislative initiatives would be a terrible political embarrassment to both the Obama administration and leaders in Congress. That is exactly the kind of believable threat progressive activists need to back up their demands of Beltway Democrats.

—Joel Bleifuss

# IN THESE TIMES

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The work of these writers is supported by the Puffin Foundation First Amendment Fund.

# letters



## Our water, ourselves

To follow up on your article “Small Towns vs. Nestlé” (July 2009), after a year of struggle, activists from Save Our Water are celebrating an important victory against the attempted corporate exploitation of ground water resources by the Nestlé Waters N.A. in Southern Maine. On May 25, the Trustees of the Kennebunk, Kennebunkport and Wells Water District voted to take the Nestlé contract off the table. Grassroots organizing can beat big money.

*Jamilla El-Shafei  
Kennebunk, Maine*

## Defending new media

David Simon’s suggestion that new media offers little more than “repetition” and “froth” displays a simple ignorance of the insightful and original content found across the internet (“Death of the Newspaperman,” July 2009). Simon is right to distinguish between traditional and new media, and the latter cannot replace the former. Simon is wrong to argue that new

media journalists are amateurs incapable of covering breaking news or holding the powerful accountable.

*Brian Depew  
Lyons, Neb.*

## Narcissistic buffoons

I couldn’t agree more with “Jon & Kate Plus Mindless Drivel” (July 2009). The media is evolving into the *National Enquirer*. Video games and social networking sites are turning us into self-absorbed, narcissistic buffoons.

*Clay Shannon  
Submitted via e-mail*

## Labor matters

The only solution to the crisis in the auto and steel industries is nationalization, with the workers controlling the decision-making process (“Auto Task Force Outsources Jobs,” July 2009). Nothing less will save jobs. As for the question “how long can capitalism last?”—as long as working people are willing to put up with this crap.

*Alan L. Maki  
Warroad, Minn.*

SEIU has the right idea in exploring a “clawback” of excessive and unearned executive bonuses (“SEIU Fights Banks Over Bonuses,” July 2009). As we’ve seen recently, an Alabama court ruled against Richard Scrushy, the former CEO of HealthSouth for \$2.9 billion. This sum includes the compensation he fraudulently earned by misstating company records to receive salary bonuses and

other fringe benefits.

I am surprised that more corporations are not suing their former executives to recover bonuses “earned” by packaging illusory loans into bundled investment contracts. I’m sure there are lawyers who would love to take on these people.

*Frank Schneider  
Chicago*

## Specter spectacle

I wanted to follow up on your editorial “Senator Specter is Haunting Dems” (June 2009) and touch on the murder of Holly Maddux in 1977 by Philadelphia “head

hippie,” Ira Einhorn. Specter, the former “get tough” Philadelphia District Attorney, was considering a run for Senate. He represented Einhorn during his murder trial, and got him off on a reduced bail of \$40,000 (of which he only had to put up \$4,000). Einhorn fled to Europe, and in 2001, was finally extradited. He received a new trial at which he was convicted and sent to jail. Why prominent citizens like Arlen Specter spend their time defending such people is beyond me.

*David Gamble  
Wynnewood, Penn.*

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Stop by *InTheseTimes.com* for features beyond the usual Web-only columns, interviews, cartoons and polls:

- ▶ As the battle over the Employee Free Choice Act continues, we’ll report on how Crate & Barrel is campaigning against the legislation—and unions in general—in closed-door meetings with employees.
- ▶ Nearly 15 million Americans are now looking for work. As the U.S. unemployment rate edges toward 10 percent, look for a special *InTheseTimes.com* feature proposing a publicly-funded “permanent jobs program” that would reorient the nation’s economy to provide full employment.
- ▶ And for fresh news and commentary on labor and workers’ rights issues, stop by *WorkingInTheseTimes.com*, our new blog, which launched in mid-July. (Apologies for the delayed launch!) If you’d like to see any specific issues covered or tip us to a breaking story, please email Web Editor Jeremy Gantz at [jeremy@inthesetimes.com](mailto:jeremy@inthesetimes.com).



# Dear Reader,

This issue of *In These Times* was edited and published by just four, paid, in-house employees.

In the last few months, I have been forced to lay off half of the magazine's staff because of a budget shortfall caused by two factors: the non-renewal of a major grant by a foundation that was hit hard by the economic crisis and the overall drop in individual donations due to the same crisis. *In These Times* has since moved to a publishing model that relies on the donated labor of volunteers. In doing so we hearken back to the past.

When Founding Editor & Publisher James Weinstein moved to Chicago to start *In These Times* in 1976, his inspiration was *Appeal to Reason*. Published out of Girard, Kan., between 1895 and 1922, this socialist weekly had 761,000 subscribers in 1912—including 38,000 in Oklahoma. When the U.S. Post Office banned its special issues (which had print runs in the millions), subscribers around the country—"the *Appeal* army"—circulated it by hand.

It is a similar "can do" spirit that has enabled *In These Times* to weather this current storm.

**On behalf of everyone connected to *In These Times*, I want to thank:**

- \* The committed senior editors, contributing editors and other journalists who report and write the articles that are *In These Times*.
- \* Perry Rosenstein and Gladys Miller Rosenstein, who support the work of these writers through the Puffin Foundation First Amendment Fund.
- \* The nine members of the *In These Times* Board of Directors (listed on the masthead), who are guiding *In These Times* and *InTheseTimes.com* into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
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**The *In These Times* Community makes this magazine possible.**

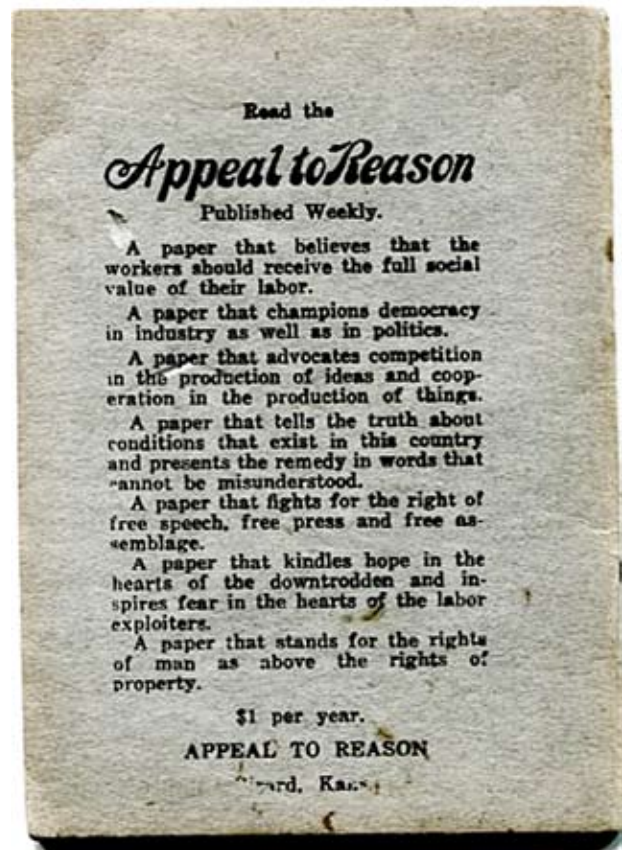
In a couple of weeks we will be sending out our summer fundraising letter to all who have donated in the past. Please give as your means allow. Or, you can use the envelope inserted between pages 18 and 19.

Thank you for your support. *In These Times* wouldn't be here without you.

In solidarity,



Joel Bleifuss  
Editor and Publisher



**P.S.** All contributions to *In These Times* are tax-deductible.

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

# Zicam: Homeopathy Fails the Sniff Test



**T**HE FOOD AND Drug Administration (FDA) has caught itself in a trap of precedent and logic that should force it, finally, to regulate homeopathic products. FDA regulations require that drugs and treatments be “scientifically proven safe and effective.” Homeopathic remedies, except when people rely on them to treat serious conditions, are usually safe as water—which

they actually are. Some homeopaths claim that shaking and serial dilutions—even to the point that not one molecule of the “active” ingredient remains—create a “memory” of the long-gone ingredient. So far, though, the FDA has ignored the multi-million dollar fraud.

After all, what’s the harm?

Well, one harm, according to hundreds of people and dozens of lawsuits, is that some of Matrixx Initiatives’ homeopathic Zicam cold “treatments” cause

anosmia—the loss of smell, a sense necessary both to enjoy a summer day and to detect gas leaks, fires and spoiled food.

Rather than the usual homeopathic magic water, some Zicam products contain pharmaceutically significant amounts of zinc, which was shown in the 1930s to cause anosmia when used intranasally. Some Zicam homeopaths also include an unspecified amount of benzalkonium chloride, which “disrupts signaling between molecules, a mechanism that could allow it to have widespread unanticipated effects,” says Peter Montague of *Rachel’s Democracy and Health News*. The U.S. Material Safety Data Sheet lists it as a hazardous, potentially mutagenic chemical; Canada bars it from products “applied to mucous membranes.”

But the giant regulatory loophole that is homeopathy allowed Matrixx, either by accident or design, to slap on the label “homeopathic,” slip under the regulatory wire and sell 1 billion doses of untested Zicam. Despite Zicam’s decade on the market and numerous lawsuits, the National Center for Homeopathy never condemned the mislabeling.

Under the Obama administration, the FDA requested that Matrixx recall a number of Zicam intranasal products. On June 16, the FDA warned, “Because they are not generally recognized as safe and effective for their labeled uses, these products [must undergo] well-controlled clinical investigations ... regardless of their homeopathic status

[before re-marketing.]”

While there is conflicting evidence that oral zinc shortens colds, it likely does little harm. The FDA, however, found Zicam ineffective, thereby fitting it under the agency’s definition of “health fraud.” It also ruled that Zicam’s moneymaking innovation of delivering the chemical into the nose rendered it unsafe.

The Zicam recall followed an earlier tough (and witty) FDA ruling that if General Mills continued to claim whole-grain Cheerios reduces cholesterol, the cereal would be regulated as a drug. In June, the agency made Bayer withdraw claims that One A Day for Men “supports prostate health.”

In addition to the 130 anosmia reports received by the FDA, Matrixx failed to notify the agency of more than 800 Zicam-related complaints.

Furthermore, since Zicam was labeled for use by children, a class of underage victims may have gone unnoticed.

Nonetheless, Matrixx CEO William Helmut called the Zi-

cam recall “a complete surprise.” And it is an expensive one. The zinc-based nasal products comprised 40 percent of Matrixx’s \$112-million sales last year. The Scottsdale, Ariz., firm used some of the profits to pay \$12 million in 2006 to settle hundreds of lawsuits by Zicam users claiming anosmia, plus \$4 to \$6 million in annual legal costs. Matrixx is currently under investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission over its handling of the FDA warning and by the Federal Trade Commission for deceptive marketing.

Questionable marketing may come naturally to Zicam through its co-founders Robert Steven Davison and Charles B. Hensley. Davidson got his Ph.D. from an unaccredited, now-defunct diploma mill in Spain. Hensley, who holds the Zicam patents, got a warning letter from the FDA about the online sale of an unapproved drug that his current company, PRB Pharmaceuticals, claims treats bird flu and SARS. And the *Washington Post* reported: “Hensley previously developed a weight-loss remedy that involves sniffing ‘specially developed aromas.’”

Meanwhile, Zicam users, who can no longer smell a rat, might develop a nose for bullshit and discover that sometimes the only thing worse than homeopathic products that have no effect are the ones that do. ■

**Homeopathic remedies, except when people rely on them to treat serious conditions, are usually safe as water—which they actually are.**

**CONTACT** Terry J. Allen at [tallen@igc.org](mailto:tallen@igc.org)

BY JAMES THINDWA

# The GOP's Democracy Double Standard



**T**HE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S recent passion for "democracy" in the Middle East has been on full display. Republican leaders have called for unqualified support for Iranian demonstrators, condemned the Iranian regime and castigated President Obama for not speaking out more forcefully.

Beating the drums for democracy can be inspiring, but, in international affairs,

the credibility of the messenger is as important as the message itself.

Setting aside their foolish demands for direct U.S. intervention in Iranian elections, Republican leaders are the wrong messengers for democracy—especially in the Middle East. Their post-9/11 disdain for Arabs and Islam, complicity in the illegal war in Iraq, and profound disregard for Palestinian rights makes them ill-suited to champion democracy in the region. Another disqualifying offense is that Republicans have all but declared war on democracy at home.

Throughout the Bush era, the GOP freely indulged its leaders' anti-democratic impulses. Unfazed by constitutional constraints, the party leaders rammed the Patriot Act through a cowed and compliant Congress. Now, as they call for more street protests in Tehran, Republicans seem oblivious to the restrictions that law has imposed on American protesters.

The Patriot Act's "disruptor" crime category gives the Secret Service wide latitude to charge protesters for "disrupting major events including political conventions and the Olympics." It also empowers the Secret Service to charge people with "breaching security" and for "entering a restricted area," which is "where the President or other personnel are protected by the Secret Service [when they are] or will be temporarily visiting."

This atmosphere of hyper-security has resulted in protesters being cordoned off in "free speech" zones, far away from the president and other possible government targets, thus rendering them invisible and ineffectual. Last year, at the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis, law enforcement invoked a state version of the Patriot Act when prosecuting political demonstrators. The

"RNC 8" were charged with a felony concerning "conspiracy to riot in furtherance of terrorism." With the exception of then-presidential candidate Ron Paul, who criticized the Patriot Act and the extension of government power, this criminalization of protest evoked nary a peep of remonstrance from the guardians of democracy assembled inside the convention hall.

While justifying these restrictions in the name of national security, GOP leaders now condemn Iranian leaders who make similar excuses for clamping down on protesters in Tehran.

"This [Iranian] regime is corrupt. ... They've killed Americans in Iraq, innocent Iraqi people, now they're killing their own people," said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.).

**When protesters at the Republican National Convention were arrested and prosecuted, it evoked nary a peep of remonstrance from attendees.**

It's easy to be skeptical of the GOP's newfound passion for democracy. After all, it is congressional Republicans who are fighting against expanding the right of U.S. workers to unionize.

Buttressed by big corporate money, the GOP has mounted an offensive to kill the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), a bill that allows union certification with a simple card-check majority. A large majority of U.S. workers have told pollsters they would join a union if they could. Often they are unable to do so, due to threats and intimidation by employers.

Sixty million U.S. workers could join unions tomorrow if Congress passed EFCA. This would have untold implications for American democracy. It is a fact of American politics that unionization increases civic engagement among workers. Why isn't this good news for Republican politicians who clamor for "freedom and democracy" all over the world? Why aren't politicians who openly call for street protests, unbridled dissent and democracy in Iran more welcoming of American citizens trying to exercise their democratic right to form a union?

The Obama administration is trying to undo some of the damage done to civil liberties in the wake of 9/11. On labor, he supports EFCA and backed the Republic Windows and Doors sit-in, but he faces a recalcitrant GOP bent on limiting democracy at all costs.

As Republican leaders crow about "freedom and democracy" abroad, it seems apropos to remind the GOP of the elephant in its own backyard. ■



IMAGE COURTESY OF SISI TANG

A bushel of sawdust and a low-tech composting toilet used for compost collection.

## Your Crap, Our Compost

Squat and the earth shall grow

BY SISI TANG

**P**OOP. A generally fecal-phobic society reacts to the thought with a mix of snickering interest and fearful aversion, all dispatched in a single flush. But Nance Klehm, 43-year-old urban forager and grower, transforms human excrement into nutritious soil one bucket at a time.

Klehm's Humble Pile, a local do-it-yourself human waste composting project, introduces a backyard alternative to the machine-churning, power-draining waste-processing facilities tucked away in remote locations.

"I'm not treating it chemically. I trust microorganisms to do it for me," Klehm says.

In early 2008, Klehm sent letters and humorous surveys to households in six Chicago neighborhoods, calling on potential participants to help "transform waste into fertility, pollution into resource, and isolation into connection."

With no need for "Compost 101" instruction, complex machinery, electricity or water, Humble Pile asked its 22 volunteer "nutrient loopers" to opt for dry buckets with snap-on toilet seats when nature calls.

To the surprise of Lora Lode, whose household participates in Humble Pile, her two teenage children Kira and Charlie were the most eager to take part in the minimalist procedure. The family

of four made room for a bucket in the bathroom and for storage drums on the back porch of their Logan Square apartment. "I was interested in this as an experiment," says Lode, who works with artists to combine art, activism and environmental concerns. Her 19-year-old son Charlie is not put off. "I just think that if I didn't have a house, this is what I would do," he says.

In place of the routine flush, Klehm supplies the "nutrient loopers" with sawdust to cover stools after each deposit, both to dispel odor and to facilitate composting.

In the summer of 2008, Klehm personally collected the feces from the Lodes and other households and composted the material in 32-gallon drums, stored at a secret location outside the city so as to avoid prosecution for violating ordinances on waste disposal and storage. "As an ecologist, I don't expect law to keep up with me—it's more important to get this done," Klehm says.

Nature doesn't seem to heed law either: Shit happens, and then goes through a two-year-long natural composting process that burps out nitrate-rich soil that smells like wet basement. The soil will cycle back into Chicago gardens, which include a 5,000-square-foot greenhouse at a homeless shelter and several additional gardens scattered throughout the city.

"I'm just interested in people understanding that their body is producing soil all the time," Klehm says, "and there's no reason not to return it back to earth."

According to Klehm, the locally produced Humble Pile compost is as nutrient-rich as sludge "fertilizer" from municipal sewage plants. "Good soil is so hard to have in the city. I'm concerned about the state of our soil—they're affecting our health, they're depleted, or they're contaminated or poisonous," Klehm says.

Deemed a fertilizer by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the controversial sludge is a concoction of everything that goes down the drain—a

heavy-metal laden medley of industrial, pharmaceutical and human waste. (In an attempt at linguistic detoxification, the EPA renamed sewage sludge "biosolids.")

Klehm's composting method has another home: an abandoned World War II-era U.S. airbase. In the salt flats along the Nevada and Utah border, Klehm and other artists and researchers of the autonomous living system Clean Livin' use urine-diverting dry toilets and a combination of composting and dehydration to process their waste for later agricultural use.

Long before Humble Pile, the waste-to-fertilizer process was discovered inadvertently by our nomadic ancestors, who flung waste onto piles that eventually became fertile soil. Later, the Sumerians and Romans hired delivery boys to carry feces in "honey wagons" to nearby fields for fertilization. The Chinese even commoditized "night soil" from wealthier households as a valuable good—the feces of the rich being more abundant in nutrients due to their better diets.

But now, just as the Western com-mode is making its widespread debut in China, Klehm is showing at least two U.S. communities that there may be a better option than the water-hungry modern flush toilet. Producing soil and fertilizer locally helps conserve energy and water, and whereas the composition of municipal sewage sludge is to a large extent a mystery, what goes into Klehm's buckets are participants' own work. What's more, Klehm ensures that her DIY fertilizer is safe by testing it for E. coli bacteria.

For Klehm, Humble Pile is not a novelty. "I've been doing this for four years," she says. "Other people think it's crazy. I just accept it as a way of life." ■

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#### GET INVOLVED

**ReSource Institute for Low Entropy Systems**  
[www.riles.org/index.html](http://www.riles.org/index.html)

**Spontaneous Vegetation**  
[spontaneousvegetation.net](http://spontaneousvegetation.net)

## Granny Get Your Gun

**C**RIME IS GENERALLY a young person's game, but that hasn't stopped an ever-growing number of older Americans from breaking the law. Following a decline through most of the '90s, over the past 10 years arrest rates for those over 50 have shot up 85 percent, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Experts predict that these numbers will continue to climb well into the next decade, as 35 million baby boomers expand America's graying population from 16 to nearly 25 percent.

Is America on the precipice of a geriatric crime wave?

"The numbers are definitely going to keep going up, no doubt about it," says Ronald Akers, a criminology professor at the University of Florida. "People are healthier and living longer, which may make crime an attractive option for some older people. Geriatric crime isn't a new phenom-

## appall-o-meter

### 3.1 Drill, Nigaz, Drill

In a stroke of genius, Gazprom, the Russian energy behemoth, has entered into a \$2.5-billion joint venture with a Nigerian state-owned gas company, according to the BBC. The new entity will be called Nigaz, and it's hard to imagine a company with such a name not having a little "attitude"—whether that was intended or not.

### 5.3 He Ripped Off the Wrong Fogeys

James Amburn, a German-American financial adviser, was abducted from his home in Speyer, Germany, and driven in the trunk of a car to a resort town on the Austrian border and beaten repeatedly for four days. His assailants were a gang of old fogeys whose money he pissed away in a Florida real estate scheme. According to reports in the British press, the knockout blow in the kidnapping was delivered with a metal walker.

The "Geritol Gang," as police dubbed the kidnappers, comprised two elderly couples who together lost more than 2 million Euros under Amburn's manage-

ment.

"[T]hey bound me like a mummy with masking tape," Amburn claimed, according to the *Sun* of London. "It took them quite a while because they ran out of breath."

He was kept in a cellar, fed soup twice a day, and occasionally burnt with cigarettes. At one point, his captors let Amburn out into the yard for a smoke. He took the opportunity to jump the wall and ran through the town naked but for his underwear. His captors ran after him, telling bystanders that the man was a thief. They managed to get Amburn back into the cellar.

Finally, Amburn promised to pay the gang back by cashing in his own securities in a Swiss bank. In a fax to the bank, he included a message for help. Shortly thereafter, 40 German commandos stormed the house and liberated him.

A physician was on hand to help the frailer members of the Geritol Gang.



They face as many as 15 years in prison.

### 2.0 Send in the Douchebag

A Wall Street trade group is paying \$70,000 per month to a strategic communications firm to head off what it fears is a "populist" backlash brewing against the finance industry. As *Mother Jones* helpfully informs us, one of the leaders of this effort will

be Jim Wilkinson, whose résumé includes being the Bush campaign spokesman during the 2000 Florida vote recount and a member of the White House Iraq Group, helping frame the Bush administration's mendacious case for invading Iraq.

Later, as the majordomo of the CENTCOM briefing room in Doha, Qatar, he cultivated a reputation as a charmer, responding, "Don't fuck with things you don't understand" to a reporter.

Seems like a perfect fit.

—Dave Mulcahey

## DARE TO RESIST

"I consider Iraq to be this generation's Vietnam," says Brad McCall, a former Army private. McCall fled to Canada in 2007 rather than "commit war crimes in Iraq." He and dozens of other military resisters are being assisted by Courage to Resist, a group that supports GI resistance by providing GIs information, doing public outreach and offering financial aid.

"Without the help of Courage to Resist, I would have never been able to speak out. They linked me up with past and current resisters, and helped me to make more informed decisions concerning my turning myself in," says Mark Wilkerson, an Iraq War veteran. "They helped me pay for a legal defense, and they helped to bring attention to an issue larger than just me resisting—that was the war in Iraq."

The organization documents the actions of service members who've taken a stand against the war. As of 2008, an estimated 200 had petitioned for refugee status in Canada. Three soldiers have been expelled by the Canadian Government and 24 others are currently being processed for deportation.

Courage to Resist is seeking donations to support these troops. Since contributions are tax deductible, donors can limit their own funding to the defense budget. Supporters can also sign an online petition to support the war resisters seeking asylum in Canada. For more information go to: [www.couragetoresist.org](http://www.couragetoresist.org).

—Adam Case



enon, nor is it unique to America. Several countries, including the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong and South Korea, have reported substantial increases in the number of elderly arrests, blaming the rises on rapidly growing—and marginalized—elderly populations. But none have seen problems on the scale of Japan, which saw arrest rates of residents over 70 triple from 9,478 to 28,892 between 2000 and 2006.

Most elderly, in America and abroad, are arrested for petty crimes such as shoplifting and drunk driving. But murder among the over-50 crowd climbed more than 15 percent in the last decade. (Music producer Phil Spector was 64 when he killed Lana Clarkson in 2003.) Drug arrests among the elderly tripled during this same period. In April, two sisters, ages 65 and 70, were busted in Stroudsburg, Penn., for selling heroin.

Akers speculates that many elderly arrestees are career criminals who maintain the stamina and strength that crime typically requires. "Late-onset criminality is very rare, and typically financial in nature," he says.

Author and geriatric expert Michael Brogden says late-onset criminality can flourish under some conditions, namely boredom. "With more able-bodied persons no longer gainfully employed, older people may be less inhibited in erring into crime," writes Brogden in his book, *Crime, Abuse and the Elderly*. "Older people, freed from past conventions, are now able to indulge as novitiates in crime."

Criminologist Ron Aday, whose previous research on elderly crime is widely cited, revisits the issue in his forthcoming book on elderly male and female offenders. He was surprised to learn that elderly arrests across crime categories are on a 10-year upswing. "As a percentage of arrests, these are significant increases," he says. "And women have certainly seen an increase in deviant behavior."

Brogden contends that the increases, as significant as they seem, are artificially inflated, due to practices that have bridged the reported crime and actual crime rates. More elderly are being charged with sex offenses that occurred



JEWEL SAMAD/ARND BRONKHORST IMAGES

**An elderly homeless man eats food he received from donation by a group based on a street in Las Vegas, Nevada, on April 19.**

years earlier. More are prosecuted for abusive behavior against spouses and children. There is less tolerance for minor crimes committed by elderly people, like shoplifting. And police more frequently arrest people for minor offenses stemming from disputes between neighbors, which are common among the stay-at-home elderly.

Brogden also notes that during hard economic times, crimes-of-survival tend to increase, as in the case of an 85-year-old Kentucky woman arrested in 2005 after selling prescription pain meds for food money. During that statewide crackdown on illegal prescription drug sales, more than 40 people over 60 were brought up on charges.

Aday says crime among the elderly will continue to increase, perhaps redefining what criminologists refer to as aging-out. After 30, the likelihood that a person will commit a major offense decreases significantly each subsequent year. But if 50 is the new 40, and 60 is the new 50, will fewer criminals age-out of crime, especially if they're able-bodied and bored?

"The aging-out process will continue," says Aday. "The question is: Will it abate by 50, or will there be a continuation of people committing crimes well into their 60s? I would expect an increase."

—Nathan J. Comp

## Budgets by the People

**O**N A CHILLY evening in late May, hundreds of Porto Alegre, Brazil, residents packed into the Cecores gymnasium of the working-class neighborhood of Restinga for their yearly regional Participatory Budgeting (PB) assembly. Mayor José Fogaça and his PB team sat before them at long tables. This year marked the 20th anniversary of the process in this southern city. The lively crowd cheered and waved banners. Residents spoke in support of their needs, or denounced the government for not fulfilling promises it had made. “Housing” was on the lips of many.

“I struggled. I’m proof of this,” said Fabiana dos Santos Nascimento, a mother of six, who won her own home through the PB process a decade ago. “I waited six or seven years to acquire my home. And now my daughters are here and I’m struggling to help them acquire a home next door.”

More than 750 residents voted housing as this year’s third most important priority, behind social assistance and roads. During the last decade and a half, thousands of working families with the National Movement for the Struggle of Housing (MNLN for *Movimento Nacional de Luta pela Moradia*) have won homes through participatory budgeting in this region alone.

The assembly was just one of 23 that occur in Porto Alegre every fall. At the assemblies, neighborhood residents participate in the allocation of city funds by prioritizing needs, proposing future government projects and electing neighborhood delegates and councilpersons to carry out their decisions throughout the year.

The Brazilian Workers’ Party first implemented participatory budgeting in the city two decades ago, under a wave of democracy that engulfed the country following the fall of Brazil’s brutal two-decade-long dictatorship in 1985. Since it started in 1989, city residents have organized thousands of public works, cultural, health and economic projects. The process has been replicated across the globe, and the World Bank now promotes participatory budgeting for “developing” nations.

Although the Workers’ Party lost control of the city government in 2004, Mayor Fogaça (who was re-elected last year under the centrist Brazilian Democratic Movement Party) promised to maintain the process.

On its 20th anniversary, this year’s assemblies had surprisingly high participation thanks to the federal “Minha Casa, Minha Vida” (My House, My Life) program, which promises to finance a million homes across Brazil by 2010. City officials told Porto Alegre residents that if they were interested in enrolling in the program, they should participate in the PB process. Residents came out in record numbers. “It has become part of the city. It is not a political process,” says Ernani Mário da Pereira, the city’s Participatory Budgeting Transportation theme coordinator. “The process is not part of the government—it is part of our residents.”

But with cronyism, a drop in funds and almost everything behind schedule, long-time participants worry the process could be headed toward extinction in Porto Alegre.

“The projects that we prioritize aren’t carried out,” said Roberto Oliveira, president of the Vila São Judas Neighborhood Association, in the region of Partenon. He strongly denounced the system’s shortcomings during a regional assembly in May. “In the last three years in Partenon, not one road was paved through participatory budgeting ... Health, which was one of our priorities, didn’t get one cent.”

Like many city residents, Oliveira blames Mayor Fogaça for the process’ “half-dead, semi-vegetative state.” Porto Alegre residents are clear that any mayor who attempts to rid the city of Participatory Budgeting would quickly find himself without a job.

“So it’s easier not to eliminate [participatory budgeting], but in reality it doesn’t work. It’s propaganda,” Oliveira says.

Oliveira’s comments are echoed by the non-governmental organization Cidade, which has been following Porto Alegre’s participatory process from the beginning. Its statistics show that only one percent of the city budget is now debated in participatory budgeting, a tremendous drop from its heyday when all budgeting de-

isions were discussed and as much as 10 percent was decided directly by residents.

Nevertheless, participatory initiatives across the planet continue to look to Porto Alegre. In 2007, Cidade held an international conference on the future of participatory democracy. Some are now calling



**Residents gather in May for the Extreme Southern Regional Participatory Budgeting assembly in Brazil.**

for a profound analysis of the system.

“After 20 years, we have passed from the inauguration phase, through the boom phase, the golden years, and now we are facing many difficulties,” says Cidade Director Sergio Baierle, who has been with the organization for nearly two decades. “I think that if you don’t discuss these difficulties, the other experiences that are trying to replicate the experience of Brazil will face similar problems.”

Despite the challenges, delegates and councilpersons continue to hold their weekly meetings, and Porto Alegre residents continue to participate, forcing the city government to follow through with their decisions.

“The process is not in good shape right now,” says Ubiratan Souza, the former coordinator of Rio Grande do Sul’s statewide participatory budgeting system, “It is much more a process of resistance, with the participation of the community.”

—Michael Fox

## snapshot



On June 29 at the Yar Hussain refugee camp in Chota Lahore, Pakistan, a young girl internally displaced from Buner looks on as other children prepare to leave for their homes. (Photo by Daniel Berehulak/Getty Images)

## Sewer Socialism Down the Drain?

**P**UBLIC WATER, ONE of the most important legacies of Milwaukee's Socialist Party, which led the city almost continuously from 1910 to 1960, is now under attack from those who see a chance to convert this fundamental resource into a profit stream via privatization.

In the name of coping with rising deficits, privatization advocates led by City Comptroller Wally Morics have proposed leasing the water system to private operators for 75 to 99 years.

Once the city moved to hire consultants on the water privatization proposal, it tapped into a broad current of citizen outrage in favor of preserving a vital part of "the commons," as public water advocates put it. The grassroots opposition to priva-

tization came to a head at a June 12 rally of some 300 pumped-up citizens outside Milwaukee's City Hall. Environmentalists, health advocates, unionists, senior citizens and youth activists were present.

"Public water is a trust that belongs to all of us," declared Cheryl Nenn, the interim executive director of the Milwaukee Riverkeepers. "Where there has been privatization, jobs have been lost and benefits cut for workers, while monitoring of water quality has been cut or eliminated, and prices have risen."

"We must stand for public ownership of public water," thundered Jim Godsil, long-time activist and editor of the webzine *Milwaukee Renaissance*.

Public water plays an unusually central role in Milwaukee's history. The advent of a public system in the late 1800s meant a major drop in water-borne diseases like cholera and typhus in Milwaukee. However, the system favored the

lucrative provision of water to wealthy suburbs over poorer city districts incapable of paying high rates. Only the election of Socialists in 1910 extended the public system to the entire city, including the heavily working-class and Polish South Side.

Milwaukee has already experienced the privatization of the other element of its water infrastructure, the sewage system, enacted under former Mayor John Norquist, a "New Democrat" darling of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page. Norquist and the city brought in United Water, a subsidiary of French-owned multinational Suez Environment, promising cost savings and major benefits. Unfortunately, United Water cut staff by one-third, cut back on quality control and unleashed numerous discharges of millions of gallons of untreated sewage into Lake Michigan.

The city terminated its contract with United Water but kept the system in private hands and recently turned the sewage system over to another French firm, Veolia.

Numerous U.S. cities that have privatized their water supply—Atlanta, Ga., Indianapolis and Gary, Ind., Stockton, Calif., and Hoboken, N.J., among others—have experienced a variety of severe problems including sharp price increases, infrastructure failures and plummeting water quality.

At a public hearing on June 15 jammed with privatization foes, a gun-shy City Council committee decided to shelve the water privatization idea. However, key city officials insist that the idea of privatization remains on the table.

Those fighting privatization hold no illusions about winning a permanent victory. "They temporarily shelved it because of the public outcry, and they're temporarily back-pedaling," says the Riverkeepers' Nenn.

"So we'll keep educating people about why privatizing is harmful and build a broader base of support for our coalition," she adds firmly. "Whether it's South Africa or Bolivia or the inner city of Milwaukee, poor people can't afford to pay what the privatizers want to charge."

—Roger Bybee



New Yorkers cool off in an inflatable pool in June 2008, in the Bronx.

MARIO TAMAYO/GETTY IMAGES

# Falling Through the Climate Gap

Poor Americans will suffer most from global warming

BY MICHELLE CHEN

**In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina swept through New Orleans and laid bare the city's shame: Deep racial segregation, intertwined with abysmal gaps between rich and poor, had left whole communities to drown in the storm's grasp. The following summer,**

nature's fury struck the opposite side of the country: California neighborhoods were pummeled with a tide of hot air. Continuing a long-term pattern of intensifying regional heat waves, the swelter coincided with a more than ten-fold increase in heat-related hospitalizations and a spike in emergency room visits. Like Katrina, the event was shadowed by class and color. According to a re-

cent state-sponsored study on the public health impacts of climate change in California, the increased risk of death associated with rising temperatures is twice as high for blacks as it is for whites.

From floods to droughts, recent extreme weather events not only reveal the intensifying threat of climate change but also expose underlying social crises.

The intersection of climate and social

inequity is often framed in an international context: Pacific Islands sinking into the ocean or ruined farmlands in Eastern Africa. But global warming is also afflicting American society along familiar fault lines of race and income. The poor and people of color—particularly those who have long borne the burden of industrial pollution in their neighborhoods—are on the front lines of global warming.

“The reality is, poor people always lived in the most environmentally vulnerable places—places that were vulnerable before the climate change problem made them worse,” says Elliott Sclar, director of the Center for Sustainable Urban Development at Columbia University. “The real problem in this country is we haven’t had a real serious discussion about the social equity issues connected to climate and en-

vironment. Sadly, too many people aren't inclined to engage in that discussion."

According to a May report on America's "Climate Gap," California cities share environmental vulnerabilities with poor populations around the world.

The report, focused on climate change in California, was published by researchers with the University of Southern California, University of California-Berkeley and Occidental College. It projects that climate change will exacerbate regional health disparities tied to industrial air pollution. In many areas, people of color suffer greater impacts from dirty air, because they are more likely than whites to live in communities heavily exposed to pollution sources like coal-fired power plants, oil refineries and transportation corridors.

The structure of many urban neighborhoods magnifies the effects of global warming. Communities that are thin on tree cover and dominated by dark-colored structures, such as gray high-rises and asphalt roads, are prone to the "heat island" effect: Surfaces absorb heat and raise area temperatures. Further, the prevalence of heat-trapping surfaces in a neighborhood correlates strongly with poverty and the proportion of people of color.

As seen in the uneven destruction wrought by Katrina, a community's resilience is often determined by social privilege. Marginal populations tend to lack insurance and be neglected by emergency response and healthcare systems.

In a study of sea level rise along California's coast, the Pacific Institute, an environmental think tank, found that the poor and people of color are disproportionately threatened by potential floods. Their vulnerability is heightened not only because of where they live, but also factors like limited English ability and lack of access to emergency transportation.

On top of natural catastrophe, the Climate Gap researchers found that climate change will impose an acute economic toll on struggling households—an injustice compounded by the fact that the poor contribute less to carbon emissions than do the rich. Extreme weather, along with growing demand for air conditioning, could drastically increase energy prices, making it harder for working-class families to cover the cost of electricity. Climate volatility could also lead to job losses in the farming and tourism sectors.

### Alaska bellwether

The ravaged indigenous lands of Alaska foreshadow the turmoil on the horizon. In June, the White House's Global Change Research Program reported that severe coastal erosion is devastating several native Alaskan communities.

On the coastal town of Newtok, the Yup'ik Eskimos have followed their traditional ways for generations, but in recent years they watched their ancestral roots wash away. Floods and erosion corroded infrastructure. A warmer climate

turned once-solid ground to muck and sunk homes into soft earth. The community worries about the disruption of fish stocks, their primary food source.

Newtok is working with the state on a plan to resettle on more stable ground. In the meantime, tribal administrator Stanley Tom says the community's roughly 340 residents are caught in limbo.

"We're deteriorating. Our morale is getting low—nothing's really happening out here," Tom says. "It is unfair, because we're not producing all that pollution."

Far south of Alaska, in Huntington Park in Los Angeles County, environmental and social vulnerabilities are locked in a dangerous synergy. The poor, mostly Latino city is dotted with industrial plants and crisscrossed with diesel truck routes. Robert Carbales, a 28-year-old organizer with the local advocacy group Communities for a Better Environment, says the political marginalization of immigrant households makes Huntington prime real estate for polluters.

Carbales—who grew up in the community and, like many others, suffers occasionally from breathing problems—says that on hot days, many poor families face a perverse dilemma. Unable to afford air conditioning, they can either try to cool off in filthy air or shut out the pollution and roast indoors.

Recalling the last heat wave, he says, "Folks were telling me, 'We'll either let these particles in or just suffer the heat wave.' And folks just had to open the window."

Robert Bullard, head of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University, says the mainstream climate change debate focuses too heavily on reducing emissions, rather than the immediate impacts on disadvantaged communities. "A lot of the people in the environmental justice communities are saying, 'We're sick and dying prematurely right now from air pollutants,'" he says. "We're not talking 20 years from now, we're not talking 2050—right now."

### Closing the climate gap

Summertime brings a wave of oppressive heat over the South Bronx, scorching a concrete landscape dense with poor, largely black and Latino neighborhoods.



A New York man endures the heat in July 2007. An American Journal of Public Health study found 146 people died of heat-related conditions in New York in the summer of 2006.

But amid a sea of heat islands, on the roof of the drab county courthouse, a patch of grass and flowers stands out like an oasis. Known as a green roof, the miniature meadow is designed to absorb stormwater, deflect heat and cool the surrounding air.

A fusion of economic development and environmental protection, green roofs have cropped up across New York and

ignores the cumulative impact of all emitted pollutants will only deepen the toxic burden borne by poor, minority, “fence-line” communities.

Moreover, most of the emissions allowances in ACES are initially given away free to industry. Though the program provides some funds to help households cover energy costs, more stringent al-

recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Still, advocates managed to push through some equity-related provisions, including measures to boost investment in green jobs training. But it’s unclear how many green jobs will be directed toward underserved communities.

However the legislation plays out, the

## Many families in Los Angeles face a perverse dilemma: Too poor to afford air conditioning, they can either try to cool off in dirty air or shut out the pollution and roast indoors.

other cities around the country. Sustainable South Bronx, a grassroots group leading the effort, aims to demonstrate how climate justice works at the community level. With government support, the organization has turned green-roofing into a job-creation initiative, training economically disadvantaged local residents as environmental maintenance workers.

Rob Crauderueff, policy director for Sustainable South Bronx, says dealing comprehensively with climate change goes beyond capping carbon. “Sustainability isn’t just about the environment,” he says. “It’s also about empowering residents throughout the city over their own futures and their own communities.”

Meanwhile in cap-and-trade Washington, environmental justice advocates waver between hope and frustration as lawmakers hammer out a climate strategy.

Environmental justice groups fear that the American Clean Energy and Security Act (ACES), which had narrowly passed the House and was awaiting action in the Senate as *In These Times* went to press, sidesteps the widening climate gap.

While the bill’s cap-and-trade framework is supported by mainstream environmental organizations like the Sierra Club, more radical environmentalists see its market-based scheme as a free ride for polluting industries. A nationwide emissions cap alone could mitigate global warming, but wouldn’t address the more localized impacts of “co-pollutants,” mainly smog, ozone and soot produced by power plants in addition to carbon. Activists argue that a federal climate policy that

alternative proposals would tax emissions to generate public revenue. The bill also provides a generous pool of “offsets”—a controversial system that enables polluters to compensate for emissions by investing in separate mitigation measures, like forest conservation programs.

### Ticket to pollute

“What you’re saying [with offsets] is, ‘It’s fine, you can keep on polluting,’” says Bill Gallegos, executive director of Communities for a Better Environment. “If you plant a thousand acres of trees in Bolivia, it’s okay to keep polluting in these communities like Wilmington, Calif., like New Orleans, like Oakland, where there’s a lot of poor people of color.”

In its current form, ACES would undercut the Environmental Protection Agency’s authority to regulate carbon emissions under the Clean Air Act, which community advocates have historically relied on to hold local polluters accountable for soot and smog emissions.

Daphne Wysham, co-director of the Sustainable Energy and Economy Network at the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Policy Studies, says the proposed weakening of Clean Air Act regulations shows that the energy industry lobby has hijacked the ACES legislation.

“The people in the immediate vicinity of a lot of these power plants will see their health and environmental rights traded for this overall cap being reached,” she says. Even that cap, she adds—an 80 percent reduction below 2005 levels by 2050—falls far short of the international benchmarks

federal response to climate change will usher in structural economic shifts and alter land-use and public transportation policies. Activists see global warming as a platform to spur investments in social services, housing and infrastructure in ways that uplift marginalized groups.

Rachel Morello-Frosch, a professor at University of California-Berkeley’s School of Public Health and co-author of “The Climate Gap” report, says that as climate policy shapes social policy, “it’s going to be really important for public health advocates, civil rights advocates, mainstream environmental advocates, to make sure the climate gap is an essential part of the conversation on how we’re going to deal with climate change.”

For the environmental justice community, the link between social inequity and environmental harm means that neither crisis can be addressed in isolation. “Climate justice policy is policy that protects ... the most vulnerable communities,” says Stephanie Tyree of the Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change. “So if we are protecting the most vulnerable, we’re protecting everyone.” ■

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### GET INVOLVED

**Communities for a Better Environment:** [www.cbecal.org/index.html](http://www.cbecal.org/index.html)

**Sustainable South Bronx:** [ssbx.org](http://ssbx.org)

**The Program for Environmental and Regional Equity study:** [www.college.usc.edu/geography/ESPE/perepub.html](http://www.college.usc.edu/geography/ESPE/perepub.html)



On June 17, a supporter of defeated presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi demonstrates in Tehran.

GETTY IMAGES

# Iran on the Brink

## Warning to the Persian cat: Don't look down!

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

**W**HEN AN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME approaches its final crisis, as a rule its dissolution follows two steps. Before its collapse, a mysterious rupture takes place. All of a sudden people know that the game is over, and then they are no longer afraid. It is not only that the regime loses its legitimacy, but that its own exercise of power is perceived as an impotent panic reaction. We all know the classic scene from cartoons. The cat reaches a precipice, but continues walking, unaware that there is no ground under its feet. It falls only when it looks down and notices the abyss. When a regime loses its authority, it is like a cat above the precipice: In order to fall, it only has to be reminded to look down.

In *Shah of Shahs*, a classic account of the Khomeini revolution, Ryszard Kapuscinski located the precise moment of this rupture. At a Tehran crossroad, a single demonstrator refused to budge when a policeman shouted at him to move, and the embarrassed policeman simply with-

drew. Within a couple of hours, all of Tehran knew about this incident. Although street fights continued for weeks, everyone knew the Shah was finished. Is something similar going on now?

There are many versions of the recent events in Tehran. Some observers view the protests as the culmination of the pro-Western "reform movement" along the lines of the "orange" revolution in Ukraine—a secular reaction to the Khomeini revolution. They support the protests as the first step toward a new liberal, democratic, secular Iran freed of Muslim fundamentalism.

But some skeptics think that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad really won, making him the voice of the majority, while the support of Mir-Hossein Mousavi comes from the middle class (who are the minority) and its gilded youth. In other words, let's drop the illusions and face the fact that, in Ahmadinejad, Iran has a president it deserves.

Then there are others who dismiss Mousavi as a member of the cleric estab-

lishment with merely cosmetic differences from Ahmadinejad. Mousavi wants to continue the atomic energy program, and he is against recognizing Israel. Plus he enjoyed Khomeini's full support as a prime minister during the 1980s war with Iraq.

### Leftists out of the loop

The saddest of all are the Leftist supporters of Ahmadinejad. According to them, Ahmadinejad won because he stood up for the country's independence, exposed elite corruption and used oil wealth to boost the incomes of the poor majority. This is, so we are told, the true Ahmadinejad behind the Western media image of a Holocaust-denying fanatic. Further, what is going on now in Iran is a repetition of the 1953 overthrow of Mohammad Mossadegh—another Anglo-American-instigated coup against a legitimate president. This view ignores factual reality along with the high electoral participation (up from the usual 55 percent to 85 percent), which can only be explained as a protest vote. It also displays an inability to un-

derstand the demonstrations as a genuine expression of popular will, and it patronizingly assumes that for backward Iranians, Ahmadinejad is good enough. They are not yet sufficiently mature to be ruled by a secular Left.

Conflicting as they are, all these versions read the Iranian protests along the axis of Islamic hardliners versus pro-Western liberal reformists, which is why they find it so difficult to understand Mousavi. Is he a Western-backed reformer who wants more personal freedom and a market economy, or a member of the cleric establishment whose victory would not affect the nature of the regime in any serious way? Such oscillations demonstrate that all interpretations miss the true nature of the protests.

### The green tide

The green color adopted by the Mousavi supporters and the cries of “Allah akbar!” that resonate from the roofs of Tehran in the evening darkness show that protesters see this as the repetition of the 1979 Khomeini revolution, undoing the revolution’s corruption and returning to its roots. It is not only programmatic; it concerns even more the crowds’ modes of activity: the emphatic unity of the people, creative self-organization, and improvisational articulation of protest. It is a unique mixture of spontaneity and discipline: the ominous march of thousands in complete silence. It is a genuine popular uprising of the deceived partisans of

the Khomeini revolution.

There are several crucial conclusions to be drawn from this insight. First, Ahmadinejad is not the hero of the Islamist poor, but a genuine, corrupted, Islamofascist populist—an Iranian version of Italian President Silvio Berlusconi. Ahmadinejad’s mixture of clownish posturing and ruthless power politics causes unease even among the majority of ayatollahs. His demagogic distribution of crumbs to the

## Ahmadinejad is the Iranian version of Italian President Berlusconi. His mixture of clownish posturing and ruthless power politics causes unease even among the majority of ayatollahs.

poor should not deceive us. Organs of police repression, a Westernized PR apparatus and a strong nouveau-riche class—the result of the regime’s corruption—stand behind him. In fact, Iran’s Revolutionary Guard is not a working-class militia, but a mega-corporation, the strongest concentration of wealth in the country.

There is a clear distinction between Mehdi Karroubi and Mousavi, the two main candidates opposed to Ahmadinejad. Karroubi is a reformist, proposing the Iranian version of identity politics and promising favors to all particular groups. Mousavi is something entirely different. His name stands for the genuine resuscitation of the popular dream that sustained the Khomeini revolution. Even if this dream

was a utopia, it’s important to recognize in it the genuine utopia of the revolution itself. The 1979 Khomeini revolution cannot be reduced to just hard-line Islamist takeover—it was much more.

### After the revolution

Now is the time to remember the incredible effervescence of the first year after the revolution, with the breathtaking explosion of political and social creativity,

organizational experiments and debates among students and ordinary people. The fact that this explosion was stifled demonstrates that the Khomeini revolution was an authentic political event—a momentary opening that unleashed new forces of social transformation, a moment in which “everything seemed possible.” What followed was a gradual takeover of political control by the Islam establishment. In Freudian terms, today’s protest movement is the “return of the repressed” of the Khomeini revolution.

Last but not least, the demonstrations show that Islam has a genuine liberating potential to find a “good” Islam. One doesn’t have to go back to the caliphs of the 10th century—we have it right here.

The future is uncertain. In all probability, Ahmadinejad et al. will contain the popular explosion, and the cat will not fall into the precipice, but regain its foothold. However, it will no longer be the same regime, rather just one example of corrupted authoritarian rule.

Whatever the outcome, we are witnessing a great emancipatory event that doesn’t fit the frame of the struggle between pro-Western liberals and anti-Western fundamentalists. If today’s cynical pragmatism inhibits our capacity to recognize this emancipation, then the West is entering a post-democratic era, getting ready for its own Ahmadinejads. Italians already know his name: Berlusconi. Others are waiting in line. ■



# Power of the People

In the long run, Iranian civil society will trump both official dogma and international influence

BY AARON RHODES



CHIP SOMODEVILLA, ARASH KHAMOUSHI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

**O**F THE MANY FACTORS that drive events in Iran, three are central to determining the country's political situation. These factors have been in a state of flux since the June 12 presidential elections, and showed few signs of stabilizing as *In These Times* went to press. First, there are the actions of the Iranian authorities and those they control. Second, there is the response of the international community—foreign governments and international organizations. Third, there is the question of what the Iranian people and civil society institutions will do. That last factor is the key to the future of Iran, but it is also the least understood.

The Iranian theocracy is among the most inscrutable structures in the world. Composed of a number of bodies, including the Guardian Council, the Assembly of Experts and the Expediency Discernment Council, it does not operate on models that journalists, political scientists and the

international foreign policy establishment can easily understand. With virtually no transparency in the system, news about communications among these bodies is sparse and strictly controlled.

The clerical establishment exerts influence through informal channels. In some ways it resembles one-party political structures like the Soviet Union and the city of Chicago where family histories, bonds, cliques, regional chauvinism and other non-ideological factors hold sway. This externally amorphous and obscure structure, composed of politically brilliant and shrewd men, is itself in a state of flux. A potentially game-changing reform initiative could come from within the clerical inner circle, which is showing itself, albeit quite discreetly, to be pluralistic. What is now termed a “coup” by the military and security forces has been going on since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took power in 2005. At the same time, the years of Ahmadinejad's presidency have yielded

an Enlightenment-style realization: Ambitious, theocratic states that use religious doctrine to govern society often corrupt religious impulses instead of sacralizing the social order.

Is Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei the best person to act as custodian for Shi'ism in Iran and inspire the faithful? Not likely, after his association with the crude political mistakes of his protégé Ahmadinejad, and after displaying a political insensitivity that has led to numerous deaths and countless injuries, engulfing the system in chaos and dragging the image of Iran through the mud.

## Iran's UN allies

The impact of the international response to the crisis has been negligible. Iran has proven time and again to be a state that does not respond predictably to international condemnation or sanctions.

Iran sits comfortably among United Nations member states, including Cuba,

**Photos above: (left) Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad gestures as he addresses the annual judiciary summit in Tehran on June 27. (center) President Barack Obama speaks during a news conference in the James S. Brady Briefing Room at the White House on June 23. (right) A supporter of Iran's defeated presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi holds a toy gun in his hand to scare away government forces during a demonstration on June 20, in Tehran, Iran.**

Sudan, China and numerous others, that deflect criticism about human rights as politicized interference with their internal affairs. The power balance in the UN makes its institutions slow to criticize the grave and obvious violations of Iran's human rights obligations during this crisis. When the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights finally issued a statement on June 19, it only referred to "possible illegal use of excessive force," even though numerous photographs and videos had already shown police and militias brutally beating and even killing demonstrators. When the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon expressed concern three days later, Iranian officials criticized his statements for having "colonial" orientation.

The United States' main interest is less about Iran than about partisan domestic politics. The U.S. debate reflects an inflated perception of the United States' power to influence events abroad. Despite appeals from reform-minded Iranians that they don't want the United States to publicly take their side as it will undermine their support and allow the government to label them treasonous tools of an enemy state, some members of Congress have persisted in calling for the U.S. president to side with the demonstrators. President Obama has tried to dodge the dilemma in a way that shows his good intentions, but his statements did not address human rights in international terms, a mistake made by the vast majority of the American foreign policy elite. He did not ask Iran to abide by its human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but referred vaguely to the universal rights of the people of Iran. It came off as a sermon about right and wrong.

Naturally, Khamenei took the bait, denouncing U.S. concerns for human rights as hypocritical considering American actions in Iraq, Afghanistan and, weirdly, Waco, Texas. The Iranian authorities have claimed that foreign agents and the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) organization, an officially designated terrorist group that has waged armed conflict with Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and recently disarmed, have fomented the mass demonstrations. The label "terrorist" can give

license to bypass domestic laws in dealing with threats—real or perceived. But there is no evidence such elements are behind the demonstrations.

Iranian leaders have pretended that foreign governments are instigating the unrest, but the international community has done little to support the protesters. Rather, they've mostly provided fodder

for propaganda meant to mobilize Iranians against fellow citizens protesting a stolen election.

### Civil restlessness

The central question now is who is more willing to tolerate more death, injury and pain at the hands of the security forces and vigilante militias: discontented Iranians or the religious establishment? The latter has the power to replace the Supreme Leader and rerun the elections. However, the military and all security forces in Iran answer to the Leader, which raises the potential for civil war if the elections are redone. The public discontent with the leadership appears to be broad, and it continues to grow as the repression against peaceful demonstrators worsens.

What makes Iran unique among the world's most repressive states is the development of its civil society. Under former president Mohammad Khatami, the words "civil society" were used so much that they became cliché. Hundreds of organizations and initiatives were formed. Ahmadinejad's fear of civil society—expressed in the repression of women's rights, student and labor groups—stems from Iranians' widespread understanding of the power of organized civil movements.

General strikes were crucial to bringing down the government of the Shah of Iran. Thus, members of women's groups gathering signatures to change discriminatory laws have routinely been arrested and charged with violating national security.

Students have met a similar fate for speaking out about campus issues, and were subsequently beaten, jailed and tortured. Independent labor unions are not allowed to celebrate May Day, much less organize factories, and outspoken labor leaders like Mansour Osanloo languish in prisons.

Of course, human rights activists are among those who have been arrested

## General strikes were crucial to bringing down the Shah. Today, despite mounting government repression, Iran's civil society groups form a huge, interconnected, reform-oriented movement.

and detained in the past days. Despite the pressure building on civil society structures for years, these groups form a huge, loosely interconnected and reform-oriented movement that supported opposition candidates Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. Neither candidate had a natural constituency, and neither impressed the citizens with his charisma or vision. Rather, their support emerged as a function of networks aided by electronic communication.

The civil society movement in Iran is made up of independent groups, individual activists, intellectuals, students, journalists, artists and members of opposition political parties. It answers to no one leader and resists calls for more rigid coordination. Its members have diverse views about the role of religion in society, foreign policy questions and virtually any social and political question, with one major exception: They believe that the government of Ahmadinejad has been brutal, repressive, militaristic and intolerant, and has abused international law. These beliefs have been reinforced by recent events, and will not change, whatever the future brings. ■

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### GET INVOLVED

[www.iranhumanrights.org](http://www.iranhumanrights.org)

[www.roozonline.com/english](http://www.roozonline.com/english)

# Home Sweet Skid Row

## Poor Los Angelenos fight gentrification and police abuse

BY DAVID WAGNER

**L**INDA VALVERDE WAS AN insurance administrator for 20 years. She never expected to live in Los Angeles' Skid Row. Neither did Michelle Autry, a dancer and writer who grew up in Los Angeles and Sacramento, Calif., and speaks five languages. Joe Thomas, a Vietnam War veteran born in Springfield, Ill., also didn't plan to live in a single room occupancy (SRO) hotel in the area.

But these three people, along with dozens of other Skid Row residents, are making big changes in their community. They are all members of an organization of poor people called Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN), a nonprofit organization funded by a variety of foundations, individuals and the state of California. This racially diverse group of men and women are fighting against gentrification, the abuses of landlords and hotel owners, and the city of Los Angeles. Surprisingly, they have scored real victories.

For Los Angeles' developers, Skid Row—or, as it is more politely called, Central City East—is a potential bonanza, located a half mile northwest of downtown and a stone's throw from City Hall and the County Hall of Administration. Until recently, developers could easily convert a single-room occupancy hotel into multiple condominium units selling at \$1 million each.

In 2002, the city of Los Angeles, in alliance with business interests, introduced a redevelopment plan. It called for the elimination of close to 4,000 units of low-income housing in Central City East. Despite the large population of African-Americans in the neighborhood, the real-estate industry marketed downtown "luxury lofts" with ads that displayed affluent white people and the occasional Asian.



On May 22, a family waits for a meal to be served outside the Fred Jordan Charity in Los Angeles' Skid Row neighborhood.

MARK RALSTON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Business leaders and city officials proclaimed the plan's benevolence, playing on the stigma of Skid Row. Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa often stated that redevelopment and removing people from the streets would "protect" the poor from drug dealers and others who "prey" on the homeless. Other officials claimed pushing poor and homeless people out of Skid Row would make the rest of the city take their "fair share" of social problems.

It can be difficult to grasp that areas that are not pretty, like Skid Row, are home to people. "I feel like I fit in here, no one judged me when I came to this community. I related to it, especially the women," Valverde says. "They are here like me because of illness, death. They had careers before they came here."

Nationwide, local governments rarely maintain neighborhoods where SROs have historically been the only thing standing

between poor people and the street. Social scientists have documented that the loss of this form of housing in the late '70s led to an increase in homelessness. Exploiting the belief that Skid Row residents were indigent—even though people have lived in the area for years—Los Angeles banked on the idea that no one would care. Neither the business community nor the city anticipated opposition.

### Unlikely victories

LACAN fought against the proposed conversion of the SROs into lofts. In a campaign marked by intense political pressure and coalition building, they scored their first victory in 2006, when the city council passed a moratorium on housing conversions. In May 2008, the council passed a residential hotel preservation ordinance, which protects 19,000 housing units from demolition or conversion into more upscale accommodations.

“If it wasn’t for LACAN, [the developers and police] would have swept downtown L.A. clean,” says General Dogon, a middle-aged African-American man who has lived his whole life in Central City East.

LACAN’s defense of Skid Row residents also focuses on the conditions within individual SROs. The group monitors for abuses, such as churning (otherwise known as the “28-day shuffle”), in which hotel owners demand residents leave after 28 days to prevent them from obtaining legal protections granted to tenants. LACAN stopped such illegal evictions at the Frontier Hotel between 2002 and 2005. At the Alexandria, another SRO, the group won restitution against the owners who discriminated against minority residents and the disabled.

Debbie Burton, a LACAN organizer, moved to Skid Row in 2000 from the Watts neighborhood located in South Central Los Angeles. She talks about the isolation of living in a hotel. “I was in this one room and seeing no one doing anything about problems,” she says. “When I got involved with LACAN I spent time observing and opening my eyes to issues like affordable housing and to ... abuse toward everyone in our community.”

### War on the homeless

But just as the organization succeeded in preserving the neighborhood, Mayor Villaraigosa and Police Chief William Bratton launched the Safer Cities Initiative. Presented as a crime control measure, the city deployed a massive police force to Skid Row and outlawed sleeping or standing in the street. The initiative

## The Safer Cities Initiative has succeeded in keeping poor people off the streets. The vast majority of the 12,000 police citations issued in the first year of the program were for jaywalking.

was approved in 2006, immediately after the city council passed the moratorium on SRO conversion, notes Steve Diaz, a community organizer who grew up in a hotel in Skid Row. “It was a planned initiative, an effort to clear the neighborhood,” Diaz says.

The Safer Cities Initiative has partially succeeded in keeping poor people off the streets. According to a report released by the UCLA Law School, “Policing Our Way out of Homelessness,” as many as 125 additional officers were used to round up the homeless and push other lower-income people off the streets. According to the UCLA report, during the first year of the initiative, there were 750 more arrests per month than the year before in the same area. The vast majority of the 12,000 citations issued in the first year of the measure, from September 2006 to August 2007, were for jaywalking. This is no minor inconvenience for the poor—fines can be as high as \$159. Because many people cannot pay the ticket or are unable to secure legal help, pedestrian violations often lead to arrests.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California confirmed residents’ charges that crosswalk times were reduced in Central City East, making it impossible for a disabled or elderly person to cross the street in the allotted time. Abuses have also included physical attacks by the police on people who refuse to move and seizures of the property of the homeless.

Pete White, LACAN’s co-director, tells

the story of a homeless woman who began screaming at the cops when they seized her belongings, which included the urn containing her mother’s ashes. According to White, the LAPD met her concern with laughter.

Although the Los Angeles police denied brutality, Police Chief Bratton told the *Los Angeles Times* on October 4, 2007, “Is there

displacement? Certainly. But what’s wrong with that in some respects? ... So if there is displacement, [it’s] all well and good.”

The UCLA study, as well as Steve Lopez at the *Los Angeles Times*, estimate that due to the intimidation and arrests, 1,500 fewer people now live in Skid Row. LACAN has responded to the city’s ordinances by forming a community watch program, training residents in how to handle the police, holding numerous demonstrations and filing lawsuits. On March 11, after finding city procedures exhausted, the group filed a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice.

“Downtown used to be a dense community, now there is no liveliness. Now it’s blank streets,” community organizer Diaz says. “You walk and see no one. You used to see people around—friends and neighbors.” Yet he said the newfound solidarity between the residents against the police has “brought the idea of resistance to a different level, creating a new culture.” ■

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### GET INVOLVED

LACAN is located at 530 S. Main St., Los Angeles, CA 90013; contact [petew@cangress.org](mailto:petew@cangress.org) or [beckyd@cangress.org](mailto:beckyd@cangress.org); (213) 228-0024

# Not Your Parents' Labor Movement

## Why the Republic sit-in failed to inspire other worker actions

BY DAVID MOBERG

**W**ORKERS OF CHICAGO-BASED REPUBLIC Windows and Doors captured the nation's attention when they occupied their workplace for six days last December. Their employer gave only three days notice of the plant's closing and showed no intention of paying their accrued vacation pay or two months of back wages, as is legally required after a notice of closing. Republic's bank, the publicly salvaged Bank of America, refused to extend credit to the company. In response, the 250 workers, mainly Latino and African-American, occupied the plant from December 5 to 10, preventing the company from moving the machinery out, until they received what they were owed.

Support poured in—from other unions, community groups, religious leaders and even president-elect Obama. Images of sit-down strikes from the Great Depression came to mind as the Great Recession deepened. Many observers thought Republic might be a harbinger of a new wave of labor militancy.

"These workers are to this struggle perhaps what Rosa Parks was to social justice 50 years ago," Rev. Jesse Jackson told a rally at the plant. "This, in many ways, is the beginning of a larger movement for mass action to resist economic violence."

### A lackluster response

More than half a year later, that larger movement hasn't materialized. Why not? It's not for lack of reasons. Employers continue to shut down workplaces, cut wages and fight pro-union legislation. Workers in other countries frequently take direct action to fight job losses. French factory workers hold managers hostage. Brazilian and Argentine workers seize and operate



On Dec. 9, 2008, workers at Republic Windows and Doors occupy the main entrance to the Chicago factory during a five-day sit-in.

DARREN HAUCK/GETTY IMAGES

businesses and, in June, British energy workers went on an unauthorized national strike.

The Republic sit-in has reverberated elsewhere, but only faintly:

- Workers at two Hartmarx men's clothing factories in Illinois and New York voted in May to stage a sit-in if the bankrupt company and its uncooperative bank, Wells Fargo, failed to sell to a buyer who would continue production in its domestic factories. (In June, the company announced it would sell to such a buyer, Emerisque.)
- At Quad-City Die Casting in Moline, Ill., workers are protesting Wells Fargo's refusal to lend to their employer, which could eliminate 100 jobs at the 60-year-old family-owned precision-parts maker. Quad-City employees, who belong to United Electrical Workers (UE), the proactive union that also

represents Republic Windows and Doors workers, are considering a sit-in to prevent their plant's closing.

- In April, Southern Californian warehouse workers at a distribution center for mega-retailers staged sit-ins at a temporary staffing agency and blocked a prominent intersection. These actions—organized by Warehouse Workers United, a project of the Change to Win labor federation—aimed to win organizing rights for warehouse workers and force companies such as Target and Wal-Mart to make sure that the contractors who staff the warehouses properly pay the largely temporary workforce.

Apart from these examples, few protests—let alone sit-ins—have occurred in response to widespread lay-offs and factory closings.

Republic workers were able to win due

to some very specific conditions. The UE has a long history of leftist leadership. Five years ago, it helped workers throw out an ineffective “mobbed up” union. They’ve nurtured strong local leaders who have twice since brought members close to striking. The workers had a legitimate demand: Pay us what we’re owed. (Only after their victory did they begin a successful initiative to keep the plant open through a sale to Serious Materials, a producer of energy-efficient windows that promised to recognize the union.)

The union targeted two vulnerable institutions: a shady employer and a bailed-out bank refusing to make loans, thus generating publicity and support in a strongly unionized city.

### One-of-a-kind issue?

There are many reasons why a new wave of militancy has not yet emerged. “I think Chicago was the aberration,” says Cornell University labor relations professor Richard Hurd. “We have very little tradition of labor militancy.”

Nelson Lichtenstein, a historian at the University of California at Santa Barbara, notes that even during the ’30s, labor militancy increased not when the economy was diving, but when it was rebounding.

Yet since 1980, unions have rarely struck or taken other direct action in either good or bad times. Their current passivity reflects the evolution of American political culture, which has been shaped by corporate and right-wing hostility to workers’ rights and unions.

Elaine Bernard, the director of the Harvard Trade Union Program, says that the rarity of Republic-style sit-down strikes can be explained by the “tremendous repression” in the United States as compared to other countries. “I’m surprised in this country, with the high level of repression, how much is happening.”

The political culture of American workers has also become even more individualistic. When unions were able to win strong contracts after World War II, many workers became comfortable with the gains from conservative business unionism. When the political right gained hegemony after 1980, neither unions nor the Democratic Party effec-

tively mobilized workers as a class.

According to University of Massachusetts sociology professor Eve Weinbaum, when workplaces close, workers tend to blame themselves. As real wages declined in recent decades, workers sought individual solutions: longer work hours, more debt. Even though many ’60s leftists now hold union staff positions, there’s a lack

## The free-market economic model drives Democratic Party policy. It denies the legitimacy of unruly democratic demands, such as a movement inspired by the Republic Windows and Doors sit-in.

of working-class leftist presence in the workplace to push for action and present an alternative explanation of events.

Workers today are often cynical about what unions or politicians can do for them. Most have little experience taking action themselves, as strikes and new organizing have declined. “The hurt and pain are still there, and you can see anger at executive pay,” sociologist Dan Clawson says. “But people don’t see how something might work and seize the opportunity.”

### Labor union shrinkage

As a result of employer hostility, globalization, weak legal protection and unions’ own failures to organize new workers, unions’ share of the workforce and strength has declined. This has led many unions to retrench or find non-confrontational ways to grow. Union leaders and their lawyers often discourage direct action, fearing financial or legal repercussions, according to Bill Fletcher, co-author of *Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path Toward Social Justice*.

In many cases, unions have become closer partners with management than with the general public. Such development of a joint labor-management strategy made the autoworkers, for example, more isolated and vulnerable to attack—and less likely to win better terms in the bailout—even if they had wanted to follow Republic workers’ lead. “Autoworkers were not thinking of taking over plants

and producing cars for fear the public would say, ‘We tried to help. To hell with you,’” says Bernard, at the Harvard Trade Union Program.

Unions do turn out members to vote disproportionately for Democrats, but labor suffers from a general political demobilization. President Obama inspired hope and political engagement. But Lich-

stein argues that “there tends to be a demobilization of the left when a Democratic president gets elected ... There’s a kind of ‘let Obama do it’ attitude.”

During the ’60s, the left pressured Democratic presidents to change course on foreign and domestic policy. Since then, political scientist Sheldon Wolin argues in *Democracy Incorporated*, the United States has evolved toward what he calls “inverted totalitarianism.” In other words, America imposes a constricted free-market model on policy while creating a controlled illusion of democracy.

Despite the current crisis of capitalism, the leadership of a new Democratic administration and right-wing claims that Obama is a socialist, this free-market economic model still dominates policy. This model denies the legitimacy of unruly democratic demands, such as a movement inspired by the Republic sit-in. A popular movement for economic democracy may develop, but it will need more than the militant disruption of business-as-usual in the workplace. It will require dismantling the debilitating, individualized free-market mindsets of workers, unions, politicians and the American public. ■

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### GET INVOLVED

UE:  
[www.ueunion.org](http://www.ueunion.org)

Warehouse Workers United:  
[www.warehouseworkersunited.org](http://www.warehouseworkersunited.org)

# We're Public ... No, We're Private

## Charter school corporations take on public school teacher unions

BY MICHAEL KLONSKY

**W**HAT BEGAN AS AN attempt by small groups of urban charter school teachers in Chicago and New York to win collective bargaining rights has exploded into a national battle between teachers' unions and operators of large charter "chain schools."

In Chicago, a successful drive to organize three schools run by the city's largest operator, Chicago International Charter Schools (CICS), and its for-profit subcontractor, Civitas, was temporarily stalled when Civitas management argued that as a private employer it is not covered under rules set down by the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board (IELRB).

Since its founding in 2004—with a \$4-million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—Civitas has touted itself as a "public school," especially when asking for state funding. But in April 2009, when a majority of Civitas teachers at the three Chicago schools signed union cards and the IELRB approved the Chicago Alliance of Charter School Teachers (ACTS) as their representative, Civitas changed its tune. Now the corporation claims that charters are essentially private schools and, as such, the IELRB has no power to recognize any union as the official bargaining unit for charter school teachers. Rather, Civitas insists the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) should decide whether or not to recognize union representation only after a secret-ballot vote. On June 2, the NLRB issued a narrow ruling upholding Civitas' claim that it is a private entity and that its teachers are private employees.

"What the decision demonstrates is that charter management organizations are private," Simon Hess, chief executive officer



On April 23, parents learn whether their children have been admitted to the Harlem Success Academy charter school system in New York.

of Civitas, told the *Chi-Town Daily News*. "That's part of the entrepreneurial spirit that has come to the public school system."

The union views it differently, according to ACTS spokeswoman Gail Purkey: "We accepted the ruling as a tactical compromise, only so we could quickly proceed with the election process, which we knew we could win."

### Union meets charter

Charter schools have grown exponentially in the past decade. Today, more than 4,600 charters employ more than 50,000 teachers nationally, and simmering discontent (and even open revolt among a significant group of young, activist teachers) has opened the field to new organizing campaigns by the teachers' unions.

Union leaders have begun organizing more aggressively, recognizing that charter schools are not going away and keeping a

wary eye on potentially competing unions like Service Employees International Union. They've also been nudged into this expanding field by recently elected American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten. As leader of New York's United Federation of Teachers (UFT), Weingarten partnered with Green Dot Charter Schools operator Steve Barr to create two of New York City's new unionized charter schools.

Barr, considered a maverick among charter management organizations (CMOs), started his original Green Dot schools in Los Angeles, taking over several large, dysfunctional inner-city high schools and converting them into smaller and, by some accounts, more successful charters. Green Dot accommodates union teachers with a short and concise contract to protect them from arbitrary firings and untenable working conditions. Its schools are intentionally

smaller than L.A.'s traditional high schools, which are among the largest in the nation, with many exceeding 4,000 students. All Green Dot schools are locally managed and rely heavily on teacher autonomy, heavy parent participation and infusions of foundation dollars for their success.

When Barr met resistance from both the L.A. School Board and teachers' union chief John Duffy, a majority of tenured teachers at Locke High School in Watts voted to leave United Teachers of Los Angeles and signed on with the California Teachers Association, the largest union in the state.

Weingarten and Barr's current partnership in New York is at least partially responsible for encouraging recent organizing efforts at two New York City charters run by Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), the largest chain of CMO-run schools in the nation with 66 schools in 19 states and the District of Columbia.

In Brooklyn, the KIPP-AMP (Always Mentally Prepared) School has pushed back frantically, targeting pro-union teachers for firing and harassment, according to Leo Casey, the UFT's vice president in charge of charter schools. The final outcome isn't assured, as the union and KIPP negotiators struggle over a proposed 25-page contract modeled on Green Dot's. According to Casey, the KIPP-AMP contract will place a limit on class size and teacher loads. It will give teachers greater say and put them on decision-making committees. There is also a strong "just cause" standard, making it difficult to fire teachers without due process.

## The charter school vision

Early school reformers and visionaries who created the first charter schools nearly 20 years ago saw charters as incubators of public school innovation, experimental pilot schools and teacher-led learning communities. These were progressives and education activists—hardly the hard-line, anti-union types who dominate charter school associations today. One of the most outspoken charter advocates at the time was none other than then AFT President Albert Shanker. The goal of early charter school advocates was school autonomy.

In 1991, Joe Nathan, director of the Cen-

ter for School Change at the University of Minnesota and a critic of the charter operators' union-busting tactics, helped write the nation's first state charter law. "In the Minnesota charter law," Nathan says, "it is explicit that charter schools are public ... there's nothing inconsistent with our teachers being union teachers." Nathan adds that moves to declare charters

## Under the Bush administration, charter management organizations with deep pockets and powerful supporters overpowered the small, independent teacher-run charter schools.

as private or efforts to block unionization are "inconsistent with the charter ideal or good public policy."

He points out that unionization wasn't an issue back then because most charter teachers were already union members and felt ownership of the schools they had helped create. Often they constituted their own small boards along with parents and community members.

The idea was to create a decentralized space within the big, bureaucratic system. The trade-off was autonomy for accountability, meaning that if the new, small schools weren't meeting the expectations laid out in the charter, the schools could lose their charters and be closed.

All of that began to change under the Bush administration's ownership society and "No Child Left Behind" policies. CMOs with deep pockets and support from conservative think tanks and foundations—as well as from Bush's Department of Education—overpowered the small, teacher-run charters, not unlike the way large food chains have replaced mom-and-pop grocery stores.

The rise of the CMOs brought with it a top-down efficiency model and an aggressive management style. It also brought at-will firings of unprotected teachers and principals, 16-hour work days, pre-packaged curricula and abnormally high teacher attrition rates. In this new vision, charters were seen as business-model schools, complete with quotas for rapid Starbucks-like economies of scale.

President Barack Obama has broken

with much of the ownership society legacy—especially in terms of support for school vouchers—though he and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan are both big fans of charter schools. Duncan has used his bully pulpit to pump the charter cause and has even threatened states with loss of stimulus funds if they fail to increase the numbers of charter schools

in their districts. One big difference from the previous eight years is that the AFT and the National Education Association (NEA) are now at the table pushing for collective bargaining rights for charter school teachers and other accountability measures for charter operators.

At a recent gathering of the nation's governors, Duncan called on them to "break through the dynamic that positions charters against unions." After invoking Shanker's name, he pointed out that "the AFT represents something like 70 charters and the NEA represents another 40. So we should stop fighting over charter caps and unite behind charter accountability."

Only in the past two years has the leadership of the AFT and NEA come to accept charter schools as a permanent reality. The questions of whether they indeed are public or private and whether their teachers can win the same collective bargaining rights are now being hotly debated, negotiated and litigated.

"Charter teachers are saying they want a voice in their workplace," UTF's Casey says. Meanwhile, labor movement and public education eyes would do well to keep a close watch on the coming charter school battles, especially in large urban districts like New York and Chicago. ■

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## GET INVOLVED

**Alliance of Charter School Teachers and Staff:** [www.aftacts.org](http://www.aftacts.org)

**Green Dot:** [www.greendot.org](http://www.greendot.org)

BY ALICE KIM

## My Brother on Death Row

For now, at least, Georgia death row prisoner Troy Davis is safe from execution. When the Supreme Court reconvenes in September, it will decide whether to hear his request for habeas corpus. Davis, an African-American, was convicted of the 1989 shooting and killing of

white off-duty police officer Mark Allen MacPhail in a Burger King parking lot in Savannah, Ga. The conviction was based solely on the testimony of nine eyewitnesses—seven of whom have now recanted or contradicted their original statements. Some have even signed affidavits saying that police coerced them into pointing the finger at Davis. The primary witness, Sylvester Coles, is now suspected of committing the murder himself.

Martina Correia, Davis' sister, has led an international campaign to save her brother's life and prove his innocence. South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former President Jimmy Carter have publicly expressed their support for Davis.

Even as Correia faces her own personal battle with breast cancer, she continues to fight to win justice for Davis.

**You are calling on Chatham County District Attorney Larry Chisolm to reopen Troy's case. What are the grounds for a new trial?**

Some of the original trial witnesses have recanted, and nine new witnesses have said they either witnessed the murder or heard one of the original eyewitnesses confess to the murder. The prosecution's whole case against Troy has fallen apart. They have one primary eyewitness left, Steve Sanders, who on the night of the crime couldn't identify the shooter and two weeks later, two months later, couldn't identify the shooter. But

he came to court and identified Troy. There's no blood, no physical evidence, no DNA. We can't kill this man because everything we used to convict him doesn't exist.

**Why has Troy's case garnered such widespread attention and support?**

You have people on both sides of the death penalty debate on the same side for a change, saying that we cannot execute the innocent. These people are willing to put their name on a document and say we need to stop, rewind and give this man a new trial, because this is not a case about black and white. This is a case about the truth. It does not make any sense to deny Troy a hearing based on the evidence, when this state has got millions of dollars to try to kill Troy with no actual evidence.

**Rep. Bob Barr (R-Ga.) says that the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, a piece of legislation he helped to write when he was in the House of Representatives, has been misinterpreted by the courts. What role did this act have on Troy's case?**

It says you have one year from conviction to bring forth information about your actual innocence. The law was enacted in 1996, but President Bill Clinton made it retroactive 10 years, which is against international human rights law.

Troy didn't have a lawyer from 1991 to 1996. When he was able to obtain a law-

yer through the Georgia Resource Center, they didn't have the funds to properly defend him. When they were getting their witnesses' statements in the late 1990s and early 2000s, they realized, "We actually have an innocent person here." They went to the courts and after every affidavit they got, the courts said, "Oh, we don't have to listen to that, because you should have brought it up in 1992." Well, we couldn't bring it up, and why should that law apply if it wasn't in effect until 1996?

**What were the factors that led to Troy's conviction? Was there prosecutorial or police misconduct?**

Both were involved, and there was a media frenzy to hang Troy. We have one newspaper in the city and three television stations, and all the stations promoted were the prosecution's statements from court.

The police terrify that black community—ride around with shotguns and everything else. So nobody knew what was going on. The prosecutor didn't have anything. The police didn't have anything until [Sylvester] Coles went in. Coles was the only one who testified he had heard the shot. Troy never had a weapon. Coles threw his weapon away and they never made him produce it. The ballistics report from 1989 said that it was negative for Troy's fingerprints, negative for everything. Yet the prosecutors said in open court that they had a ballistics report that linked Troy to the crime.

**Do you think Obama will pardon Troy?**

No. Because he only pardons at the federal level, so there is no jurisdiction there. But that doesn't mean that Obama doesn't have influence. I wish he would intervene. We have been sending letters and sending letters, but Obama hasn't said anything about Troy's case. And I can't believe he doesn't know about it.



Martina Correia, Troy Davis' sister, speaks during a July 2008 protest to denounce the death penalty in the United States.

**You've worked with Amnesty International and other anti-death penalty organizations. How have you been able to build such widespread support for Troy?**

I was persistent. People thought I was lying or biased because I was Troy's sister. But I kept showing people court transcripts and documents, and I was able to convince the Amnesty International Secretary General to do a special report on the case. I had Troy's lawyer send over his court transcripts to a special investigator in the U.K., and this legal expert took about three months to go over Troy's case line by line, item by item. They wrote a 35-page report, and when the report hit the Internet in February of 2007, everything hit the fan. People could not believe that they were trying to kill Troy with this kind of evidence. If we had the power of Internet 10 years ago, my brother would probably be free right now.

**What other factors have been critical in building a loud and vocal movement to save Troy's life?**

Grassroots efforts. Getting the message

to the people—not to all the big organizations, but talking to the people who care about human rights, human kindness and dignity, and educating them about the whole system. Then people were willing to spread the knowledge and tell Troy's story. I challenged them: "Go find the information for yourself." And that's what people did.

**You have faced a personal battle with breast cancer. It's not unusual for you to be in chemo one day and flying across the country to speak at a conference the next day. How do you keep going?**

I have a strong faith in God and in family. If I have to sacrifice myself or my health to make sure that my brother is free, then I'm willing to do that.

And I live in a place where we don't just have racism, we have classism and all other kinds of -isms. People tell me all the time, "Oh, Savannah is such a beautiful place." But you don't have to live here in my skin. As long as you don't cross certain lines, everything is fine. People think Savannah has evolved. But those

same trees with the moss on them that are so beautiful to look at—if those trees could talk they would tell you a whole different story.

It doesn't make any sense for me to see little black and Hispanic boys, lined up on a street corner with people searching their pockets just because they're standing there. When police cars pull up in the park, little boys are so afraid that they just take off running. Then when they shoot one of those boys in the back, it's always justified.

I'm standing up for a whole lot of Troy Davises. Not just people on Death Row, but people who cannot fight the system, because those are the people that they target. They target people who don't have power to fight back.

**What kind of transformation have you seen in Troy over the last 18 years, and how has he been able to maintain his spirit and his strength?**

Troy has always been a good person, a good spirit, a good aura. When you walk into a room with Troy and he smiles, it just lights up your spirit. He has no hatred toward anybody because he believes that in order for God to help him, he can't harbor ill will toward the people who wrong him.

Troy has a strong sense of family. He has a lot of friends, people from all faiths and religions visiting him, prisoners and guards giving him encouragement. Yet he still knows there's an underlying thing—that the state of Georgia wants to kill him. But you know what, we can't live in fear. And so we have to keep fighting, keep pushing and keep doing whatever we can. Troy—through his letters and cards and pictures that people send him from all around the world—is able to travel in his imagination. That's a powerful thing, for people who have never met you and who you may never see to stand up for you. ■

**GET INVOLVED**

**Troy Davis Call to Action:** [www.troyanthonydavis/call-to-action.html](http://www.troyanthonydavis/call-to-action.html)

**Campaign to End the Death Penalty:** [www.nodeathpenalty.org/content/index](http://www.nodeathpenalty.org/content/index)



On March 1, 1968, Cesar Chavez (center) talks with grape pickers about the United Farm Workers union.

ARTHUR SCHATZ/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

BY ETHAN PORTER

## Why David Sometimes Wins

Barack Obama's victory last November, improbable though it was, did not come out of nowhere. Rather, his campaign was indebted to the lessons and traditions of community organizing. Of course, before he became a politician,

Obama organized the churches of Chicago's South Side. But there's a longer lineage. If the new book by organizing guru and former Obama advisor Marshall Ganz is any indication, it's clear that the Obama campaign was influenced by the 1960s and 1970s organizing efforts of Cesar Chavez.

In *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (Oxford, June), Ganz details how Chavez emerged from nowhere to lead the fight to unionize farm workers. The similarities between Chavez's campaign strategy and Obama's are striking. You could say that Chavez provided Obama with a first draft.

Ganz's personal history and strategic insights make his argument for him. In 1964, Ganz dropped out of

Harvard, and a year later he joined Chavez and the National Farm Workers Association in California, where he soon ascended the leadership ranks. Decades later, things came full circle when Ganz returned to Harvard as a teacher, preaching the gospel of organizing to the American elite. In the summer of 2007, he was recruited by the Obama for America campaign. At several "Camp Obama" retreats for staffers and allies, he explained the principles of community organizing—principles that would later lead Obama to victory against Hillary Clinton and then John McCain.

*Why David Sometimes Wins* is a look back as well as a look forward. Ganz recounts the gripping story of Chavez and the farm workers and synthesizes

Chavez's lessons to explain why the farm workers triumphed against the odds. He distills community organizing to its most fundamental, and effective, principles.

Ganz places special weight on the biblical story of David and Goliath, in which David, the meek shepherd, defeats the hulking soldier Goliath. In Ganz's telling, David prevails not by emulating Goliath, but by wisely using the tools that are available to him. While Goliath arrogantly depends on his physical strength, the strategically cunning David shoots Goliath down with a stone. The moral: A well-implemented, original strategy can overcome innate disadvantages.

"The likelihood that a leadership team will devise effective strategy depends on the depths of its motivation, the breadth of its salient knowledge and the robustness of its reflective practice," Ganz writes. At the height of its success, Chavez's team combined all three. Since the turn of the 20th century, efforts to organize farm workers had not achieved lasting change. The workers—who were exempt from many labor law protections—faced brutal poverty. They worked without anything resembling a contract and faced exploitation by farmers and ranchers. A child of migrant workers himself, Chavez was so deeply committed to the cause that he often worked for little or no money. He often convinced his team to follow suit; they had to "suffer" for the cause, he would say.

The National Farm Workers Association (which would later become the United Farm Workers) coupled their motivation with a keen awareness of the farm worker community's character. Unlike previous attempts to organize workers, Chavez's union colored its efforts in overtly religious themes. Our Lady of Guadalupe, a Mexican religious symbol, was a fixture in the union's promotional materials; during one strike, when the court prevented NFWA from picketing, the union held a religious vigil instead.

Finally, the union's "reflective practice" was robust. Chavez held townhall-style meetings among union members, and in leadership meetings he demanded input

from everyone. For the NFWA, "open deliberation" were words to live by.

The results, for a few fleeting years, were pure glory. Despite having minimal experience, the NFWA improvised its way to a 1970 victory against the powerful grape growers of Delano, Calif., from

ter funded and established, and the growers had squashed every organizing effort for decades. But the Teamsters had little working knowledge of what made farm workers tick, using the same methods in the fruit fields of California as they did everywhere else. The growers were just as

## **What happens when David becomes Goliath? Does he become arrogant and tactically incompetent? 'Remaining David can be even more challenging than becoming David,' writes Ganz.**

whom they elicited a contract and a pay raise due in part to Chavez's mastery of drawing support from the establishment. Sen. Robert Kennedy (D-N.Y.) famously pledged his solidarity, as did California Gov. Pat Brown. The union later rode their momentum to another victory over the storied DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation. The legend of Cesar Chavez as a champion of the poor and downtrodden was enshrined in the national consciousness.

The analogies between Chavez's campaign and Obama's are numerous. Both faced dual Goliaths—Obama had Clinton and McCain, while Chavez had Teamsters bent on encroaching upon his territory, as well as the farm owners. And both turned their disadvantages into advantages. What they lacked became the reason why they won.

Obama began the primary race as an outsider, with few connections to big money donors and with the powerhouse consultants in the Democratic Party on the other team. Out of necessity, he cultivated an army of grassroots donors who provided him an overpowering edge against the initially better-funded Clinton. Clinton's consultants, meanwhile, suffered from the blinding overconfidence common among Goliaths. They focused on winning the popular vote in expensive states, while Obama's campaign concentrated on capturing the delegate count, which gave him the edge and the nomination.

Chavez, too, started as the quintessential outsider. The Teamsters were far bet-

ter funded and established, and the growers had squashed every organizing effort for decades. But the Teamsters had little working knowledge of what made farm workers tick, using the same methods in the fruit fields of California as they did everywhere else. The growers were just as

clueless about the tide of grassroots opposition that Chavez had generated. During a 1973 strike, 17 million Americans boycotted food such as wine, lettuce and grapes in solidarity with the workers. By the end, both Obama and Chavez were more than merely leaders of a campaign—they inspired movements. They electrified their supporters, who were willing to devote extraordinary amounts of time and money in the name of a larger cause (or, in Chavez's case, *la causa!*).

Their opponents, on the other hand, relied on hired help, whose primary objective was not to change the world or even to win, but simply to get paid. Sure, Obama had hired staff—but again, he followed the Chavez model and blended his top leadership levels with campaign veterans and amateurs. He mixed establishment figures like David Axelrod with countless operatives who lacked presidential campaign experiences (memorably resulting in a Che Guevara poster found hanging up in an Obama office.)

Even Obama's widely admired advances in Internet campaigning seem descended from what Ganz sees as the Chavez model. Obama's "MyBO" webpage, a self-sustaining social network, connected supporters from across the country to discuss, encourage and, at times, criticize the candidate. It became an extreme sort of "robust reflective practice"—sometimes too robust, such as when the site's users united against a particular stance of Obama's. But this only further fueled his supporters' motivation. Moreover, it provided the

campaign a treasure trove of information about his supporters. The “salient knowledge” that Obama had of those he was attempting to organize came in the form of addresses, phone numbers and warm bodies for “get out the vote” efforts.

The strategic approach outlined by Ganz drove both Chavez and Obama to victory. But what happens after such a victory—what happens when David becomes Goliath? Does he become arrogant and tactically incompetent? Ganz knows this is a danger: “Remaining David can be even more challenging than becoming David in the first place.”

For Chavez, the challenge proved too great. After the NFWA’s initial historic wins, later successes were hard to come by. Under Chavez’s late-period leadership, the union turned inward and Chavez-centric: He installed friends in key leadership positions and went on periodic purges against those he deemed “disloyal.” In 1977, the union stopped organizing altogether. It’s still around today, but wages in the California agricultural industry are actually 20 to 25 percent lower than what they were in the early 1970s. Ganz concludes, “The living and working conditions of California farm workers are little better at the beginning of the 21st century than when [Chavez] began organizing in the early 1960s.”

Obviously, it’s much too early to reach any conclusions about the efficacy of the Obama presidency. Yet to avoid the fate of Chavez, Obama would be well-served to avoid one thing: entrusting too much to himself. In other words, from Obama’s perspective, it must be tempting to think that his own star power, like Chavez’s, will carry him through many rough patches. It probably will, as it already repeatedly has. Yet after he scores a few too many victories and convinces himself that his personality alone is enough to conquer anything, the public is likely to tire of him. Even after winning, Obama will have to consciously remain humble. To remain Goliath, in other words, you must continue to behave—and strategize—like David. ■

**ETHAN PORTER**, the associate editor of *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, blogs for *True/Slant* and has written for *The Nation*, *The New York Daily News*, *Politico*, and *The New Republic*.



*Tapologo* tells the story of a group of HIV-positive sex workers in South Africa’s Freedom Park squatter camp who become home-based care-workers for neighbors living with HIV.

IMAGE COURTESY OF TAPOLOGO FILMS

## FILMS

# Outtakes of Africa

By Brandon Harris

**N**OW IN ITS 20th year, the annual Human Rights Watch International Film Festival culls together a trove of the year’s more notable politically conscious motion pictures. Held in Manhattan in June, this year’s festival played host to 32 films from 17 countries.

While the festival featured fantastic work from around the globe, this year’s most affecting films dealt with sub-Saharan Africa, perhaps the most consistently troubled part of the world and one that desperately begs for cinematic calls to action.

Sally Gutierrez Dewar’s *Tapologo* focuses on HIV-positive former sex workers in South Africa who care for those with more advanced cases of the virus, while Barbara Attie and Janet Goldwater’s *Mrs. Groundo’s Daughter* details a Malian woman’s struggle to obtain asylum in the United States to protect her daughter from the grotesque practice of female genital mutilation.

But Anne Aghion’s *My Neighbor, My Killer*, a powerful and haunting cinematic statement, left stronger impres-

sions. Aghion’s third film shows us Gafumba, Rwanda, a village permanently scarred by the 1994 genocide. Aghion takes us into the heart of Rwanda’s attempts to exorcise the ghosts of its past via open-air hearings where victims and their families judge those who took part in the slaughter.

Digging deep into the psyches of Gafumba’s killers and survivors, Aghion brings us uncomfortably close to human beings, capable of both cruelty and forgiveness, who are caught in a moral nightmare. By the end of *My Neighbor, My Killer*, it is clear that the future of Rwanda hinges on mutual healing between Hutus and Tutsis.

The festival’s most compelling portrait of Africa, however, was *Good Fortune*. An incendiary look at how foreign aid can unintentionally exacerbate problems in some of Africa’s most impoverished regions, Landon Van Soest and Jeremy Levine’s documentary traces the effects of a UN-sponsored initiative to renovate Kibera, one of the world’s largest slums in Nairobi, Kenya.

As this fascinating and infuriating film illustrates, Kenyans in both Kibera and the farmlands of the country’s western provinces are struggling with well-meaning but poorly conceived and paternalist

encroachment from the West.

Levine and Soest, who studied as a Fulbright Scholar in Kenya before embarking on this ambitious chronicle of the ways foreign aid can disrupt both rural and urban life, do a good job of balancing their Kenyan subjects, international agribusiness operators and UN urban developers to paint a complex picture of a broken system.

*Good Fortune* intercuts between a Kibera midwife's struggle to keep her business afloat amidst the slum's infrastructural changes and a family farm threatened by a multinational's plan to build a mechanized rice farm. That farm could conceivably produce enough rice to help alleviate hunger in the surrounding provinces, but not without flooding the lands of nearby independent growers.

The film shows how top-down approaches to international aid are doomed to fail—a lesson paternalistic Western governments ought to heed. The road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions. ■

## BOOKS

# Queer Prehistory

By Doug Ireland

**M**YTH HAS IT that the 1969 riots at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village were the first open queer rebellion against discrimination. Not so. In 1965, the first queer sit-ins on record took place at a late-night Philadelphia coffee shop and lunch counter called Dewey's, a popular hangout for young gays, lesbians and drag queens.

The establishment began refusing service to this LGBT clientele, prompting a protest rally on April 25, 1965. Dewey's management turned away more than 150 patrons while the demonstration went on outside. Four teens resisted efforts to force them out and were arrested and later convicted of disorderly conduct. In the ensuing weeks, Dewey's patrons and others from Philadelphia's gay community set up an informational picket line protesting

the lunch counter's treatment of gender-variant youth. On May 2, activists staged another sit-in, and the police were again called, but this time made no arrests. The restaurant backed down, and promised "an immediate cessation of all indiscriminate denials of service."

In August 1966, there was a riot at Compton's Cafeteria, a 24-hour San Francisco eatery popular with drag queens and other gender-benders, hustlers, runaway teens and cruising gays. The Compton's management had begun calling police to roust this nonconformist clientele, and one night a drag queen precipitated the riot by throwing a cup of coffee into the face of a cop who was trying to drag her away. Plates, trays, cups and silverware were soon hurtling through the air, police paddy wagons arrived, and street fighting broke out. Some of the 60 or so rioting drag queens hit the cops with their heavy purses, a police car was vandalized and a newspaper stand was burned down. The Compton's Riot eventually led to the ap-

## [ art space ]



### MUD IN YOUR EYE

Street art is often stigmatized as a form of gang-related vandalism, with toxic, indelible spray paint as its medium of choice. Milwaukee artist Jesse Graves came up with a better technique: mud stenciling, which he began using two years ago to make public environmental statements that were both eco-friendly and not explicitly illegal.

On June 6, about 30 members of an Illinois group called Tamms Year Ten made 6-by-9 foot mud stencils across Chicago to raise awareness of the Tamms Correctional Center, a downstate supermax prison where some inmates have been kept in solitary confinement for more than 10 years.

To see other examples of Jesse Graves's work, go to [mudstencils.com](http://mudstencils.com). For more information about Tamms Year Ten, visit [www.yearten.org](http://www.yearten.org).

—Robin Peterson

pointment of the first police liaison to the gay community.

These are just two of the many nuggets of little-known or forgotten queer history to be found in *Smash the Church, Smash the State: The Early Years of Gay Liberation* (City Lights, June 2009), the new anthology edited by Tommi Avicolti Mecca, himself a veteran of the earliest gay liberation struggles, and today a San Francisco-based gender-bending performance artist.

By the time of the Stonewall riots in June 1969, rebellion and radicalism were in the air. The country had been riven by the mass agitation against the war in Vietnam. America's cities had exploded in urban riots by the black underclass. Feminists had begun to articulate their own liberation ideology and burn their bras. Stonewall and the militant gay liberation movement to which it gave birth arose out of this '60s turbulence.

If the first night of the Stonewall riots was spontaneous, the ensuing nights benefited from activist participation. Mark Segal, who for 32 years has been the publisher of the *Philadelphia Gay News* writes, "Marty Robinson recruited me into the 'activist group,' a subgroup of Mattachine New York. If there were organizers of the demonstrations on the nights following the [first] Stonewall riot, it was us. After the first incident in which cops raided the bar, Marty had the brilliant idea to have us write in chalk on Christopher Street, 'Stonewall Tomorrow Night.' For three more nights, we gathered and protested."

Stonewall became the much-evoked milestone because it was followed by the launch of a concrete and militant political organization, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Within two years, imitators of the New York GLF had launched some 300 independent Gay Liberation Front cells across the country. At GLF demonstrations, one frequently heard the chant "2-4-6-8, smash the church, smash the state!"—hence the title of Avicolti Mecca's collection of articles.

Nick Benton, a founder of the Berkeley Gay Liberation Front, writes that for him and his fellow GLF activists, "gay liberation was part of the larger struggle of human beings for liberation, in solidarity with the civil rights, anti-war, feminist,

## excerpt



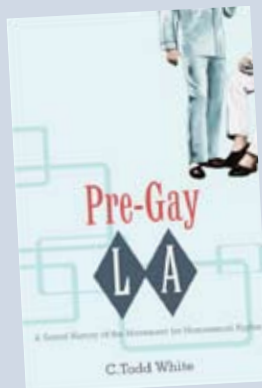
*In Pre-Gay L.A.: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights (University of Illinois Press, May), social historian C. Todd White recounts the story of the federal government's attempt to censor the magazine ONE.*

[T]he postmaster detained ONE's October ... issue, the cover of which prophetically said, "You Can't Print That." Government censors nevertheless "banned it under a law that forbade the mailing of any 'obscene, lewd, lascivious or filthy' publication" ... because of a short story attributed to Jane Dahr, "Sappho Remembered," which favorably portrayed a lesbian romance. ...

[Attorney Eric] Julber presented his case against [Los Angeles] Postmaster [Otto] Olesen on January 16, 1956, with District Judge Thurmond Clarke presiding. Julber countered that the magazine was not "obscene, lewd, lascivious, or filthy" ... On March 2, 1956, Clarke entered judgment in favor of Postmaster Olesen, stating that the magazine in question contained "filthy and obscene material obviously calculated to stimulate the lust of the homosexual reader ... The suggestion that homosexuals should be recognized as a segment of our people and be accorded special privilege as a class is rejected." ...

In addition to Clarke's commentary, the judges added that the magazine in question "has a primary purpose of exciting lust, lewd and lascivious thoughts and sensual desire in the minds of persons reading it." They added: "Social standards are fixed by and for the great majority and not by or for a hardened or weakened minority" ...

In January 13, 1958, the Supreme Court reversed the Ninth Circuit Court's rulings in *ONE vs. Olesen*. Murdoch and Price, in their comprehensive study of the history of lesbians and gays in the Supreme Court, conclude ... "Millions of American gay men and lesbians have learned to hold their heads up high in part because an obscure little magazine successfully stood up for itself long before many of them were born."



and Third World liberation struggles."

The personal testimonies collected for *Smash the Church, Smash the State!* help recreate those heady, joyously rambunctious days of "sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll." Queers, influenced by the hippies, Yuppies and Zippies, built their own radical wing of the youth counterculture and created their own influential publications—including Boston's *Fag Rag*, which published the notorious Charlie Shively article, "Cocksucking As an Act of Revolution."

There are contributions by women who tired of the male domination of GLF and founded groups like RadicalLesbians, RedStockings and Dyketactics. There are also accounts both of radical gay liberation's earliest and often campy direct actions and of the factional fights

that eventually destroyed GLF and led to its replacement by the much larger—and single-issue—Gay Activists Alliance.

Avicolti Mecca has not abandoned the anarchic radicalism of those early days. He writes in his introduction, "In many ways, the new millennium gay movement is the antithesis of the early '70s gay liberation. It cavorts with politicians who may be good on gay issues, but not on concerns affecting other disenfranchised communities. It courts corporate support for its ... pride parades, which used to be protest marches and celebrations of the Stonewall Riots. Now those marches seem more of a market than a movement."

On this 40th anniversary of Stonewall, that's a critique that deserves to be heard. ■

# Piles of Diapers

Continued from back page

On average, a single baby will go through 5,000 to 7,000 diaper changes in the first two years of life. This means that Nadya Suleman's octuplets will need as many as 56,000 diapers and the Duggar brood has already used well over 100,000! Where do all of these diapers come from and where do they go to? Well, they come in boxes from Target or Wal-Mart, and once they're all nasty and poopy they disappear, like magic, into the Diaper Genie. Poof! Nearly 18 million amazing vanishing acts performed every year.

But of course it doesn't really work like that, does it? Diapers are feats of modern engineering, a combination of trees and petrochemicals molded into ultra-absorbent, disposable miracles. Every year 250,000 trees and 3.5 billion gallons of oil go into keeping the bottoms of American babies dry and happy. That amounts to 3.5 million tons of diapers headed for landfills to spend the next 200 to 500 years decomposing, kicking out greenhouse gases, and leaching all of the toxins associated with the disposal of human waste into the soil and eventually into our water supply. Figure in the impact of chemical by-products like dioxin created during the manufacturing process, add the carbon cost of transportation from China and the packaging—one cardboard box per baby per week, on average—and it's easy to see why disposable diapers are such an environmental nightmare.

And all this before the baby is even big enough to become a serious consumer and polluter.

It's a tough call for environmentally conscious parents, and debates rage back and forth about the pros and cons of cloth versus disposable diapers. Even traditional cloth diapers have their own set of environmental hazards that come along with producing, delivering, bleaching and laundering. But babies need diapers, lots of them.

So if environmental impact is proportional to number of diapers multiplied by number of babies, and if diaper reduction isn't feasible, is the solution a reduction in

the number of babies produced?

Big families were once necessary to ensure that at least some of those offspring made it to adulthood to reproduce and continue the family line, but with modern medicine and our current standard of living, infant mortality rates are low and life-threatening childhood diseases have all but been eradicated. Plus, child labor

woman, a figure already significantly higher than that in other developed nations such as Canada, Germany and the U.K. And there are no signs that Duggar plans to stop at 18.

God may want us to value life and reproduce like it's going out of fashion, but I'm pretty certain that the same God would prefer a planet that is inhabitable for all

## Every year 250,000 trees and 3.5 billion gallons of oil go into keeping the bottoms of American babies dry and happy.

laws mean that little Billy no longer has to head for the coal mines or the chimneys to earn enough to help feed the little ones. Unless you're one of the approximately 200 million women worldwide who do not have access to birth control options, there's no real reason for producing a bigger-than-average brood.

Michelle Duggar explains that her enormous family came about because the loss of her first child through miscarriage was God's punishment for using birth control. So she renounced the pill and the results are evident, with her current brood now numbering more than eight times the national average birthrate of approximately 2.1 births per

His creatures. I myself subscribe to the evolution school of thought and firmly believe that if the human race keeps destroying its own natural habitat, we're going to evolve ourselves right out of the picture, which may ultimately be the best thing for the planet and its remaining species.

Every American, including Octo-Mom, is responsible for doing his or her part to reduce the damage caused by their overconsumption. We need to drive smaller cars shorter distances, learn to value our natural resources, and consider the source and ultimate disposal of the products that we buy. And perhaps it's also time to reconsider the number of new mega-consumers that we bring into the world. ■



**REVOLT ON GOOSE ISLAND**  
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**Kari Lydersen**  
contributing editor, *In These Times*

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# THE POOP ON POPULATION



## Disposable diapers harm the environment, so here's a modest proposal

BY LISA J. MANTERFIELD

**Y**OU CAN'T PICK UP a newspaper or a gossip magazine these days without being hit in the face with news about another super-family. And while I was busy following the progress of Octo-Mom's brood of tiny bundles and keeping up-to-date (but pretending I'm not) with the shenanigans of Jon, Kate and their eight, I somehow overlooked the news that Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar, the Arkansas couple with 18 children, are expecting a grandchild in October. Well, glory hallelujah! Just what the world needs—another American consumer.

The world's population is spiraling out of control, and United Nations estimates suggest that the current 6.7 billion will have grown to 9.2 billion by 2050. Already, we cannot provide a large percentage of these people with the basic needs of food and water. But here in the United States, we have plenty of food; our population isn't in danger of going hungry and we can feed 18 children, no problem. But our measly 4 percent of the world's population accounts for 25 percent of greenhouse gases. The problem here is not hunger, but consumerism and the environmental impact each of us has. More Americans equal more pollution, and it begins at birth.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 35**