L.A. Organizations Gather to Expand Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign

WRITTEN BY STEVE DIAZ

On October 5, 2013 people from across the City of Los Angeles gathered at the Young Burlington Apartments to expand the impact of the Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign. The goal was simple: Bring together organizations who believe in the Homeless Bill of Rights so we can map out our strategy and make commitments for a successful campaign.

The goal of the Homeless Bill of Rights campaign is to pass legislation that protects the civil rights of homeless individuals, whose lives are criminalized on a daily basis for such basic self-sustaining activities as sitting, sleeping, and eating food in public. A Homeless Bill of Rights would protect the following rights and prohibit the enforcement of any local laws that violate these rights:

1. The Right to move freely, rest, sleep, and pray and be protected in public spaces without discrimination; 2. The Right to occupy a legally parked vehicle; 3. The Right to serve food and eat in public; 4. The Right to legal counsel if being prosecuted for infraction level citations; 5. The Right to 24-hour access to existing “hygiene facilities.”

“Fighting for the rights of the unhoused is absolutely essential because the unhoused are among the most marginalized in our society,” said Isaac, an attendee and campaign member. “Most of us know that the priorities in our society are in direct contradiction to human needs. All the money and resources that go to war, policing, and the Prison-Industrial Complex need to go to meet people’s needs, like shelter, food, and clothing. But, until we get those resources, the rights of unhoused people need to be protected.”

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Pueblo Del Rio Tenants Stand Up for Community Health

WRITTEN BY ERIC ARES

Chants of “WHAT DO WE WANT!? SPEED BUMPS! WHAT DO WE WANT!? STOP SIGNS!,” could be heard throughout the Pueblo Del Rio Public Housing community on October 11, when Pueblo Del Rio Tenant Committee leaders held an action at the intersection of 54th St. and Morgan Ave. to bring awareness to the lack of sufficient stop signs and speed bumps in and around the community.

According to members of the committee, the issue of speeding cars in the densely populated residential area has been a problem for years. But neither the City nor the Housing Authority of Los Angeles (HACLA) have done anything about it. However, Pueblo Del Rio tenant leaders have never let the poor representation of their elected officials nor the negligent practices of HACLA stop them from organizing to improve their neighborhood and protecting the health of their community.

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Los Inquilinos de Pueblo Del Rio Luchan por la Salud Comunitaria

ESCRITO POR ERIC ARES | TRADUCIDO POR THELMY PEREZ

Los cantos de “¿¡Qué queremos?! ¡TOPES! ¿¡QUÉ QUEREMOS?! ¡señales DE ALTO!”, Se oían en toda la comunidad de Vivienda Pública, Pueblo Del Rio el 11 de octubre, cuando los líderes del Comité de Inquilinos de Pueblo Del Rio celebró una acción en la intersección de las calles 54th y Morgan Ave. para hacer conciencia de la falta de suficientes señales de alto y topes en los alrededores de la comunidad.

Según los miembros del comité, los autos corriendo a toda velocidad en la densamente poblada zona residencial ha sido un problema desde hace años. Pero ni el Ayuntamiento ni la Autoridad de Vivienda de Los Ángeles (HACLA) ha hecho nada al respecto. Sin embargo, los líderes de Pueblo Del Río nunca han dejado que la escasa representación de sus funcionarios electos, ni las prácticas negligentes de HACLA los pare de organizarse para mejorar su vecindario y proteger la salud de su comunidad.

CONTINÚA EN LA PÁGINA 7
Housing Watch

WRITTEN BY STEVE DIAZ

Housing Authority Agency Plan

On September 26, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles Commissioners conducted their final hearing regarding the 2014 Agency Plan. Every year, the Housing Authority is required by federal law to create a plan that documents its goals, objectives and policies for the coming year and it applies to all Public Housing, Section 8 and Shelter Plus Care tenants in the City of LA.

LA CAN and LA Human Right to Housing Collective members participated in the Agency Plan process in numerous ways, with more than 100 tenants giving comment at various hearings and meetings.

Speakers raised concerns facing Jordan Downs tenants around potential displacement in the redevelopment plan and increased eviction notices that tenants have been receiving. Other public housing residents opposed the increase in flat rents because it will force some of the City’s poorest tenants to choose between paying rent and other needs including food and medicine. Section 8 tenants opposed a new reason for eviction that was so broad that people could have been evicted for almost anything.

While tenants did not achieve all of our goals, our organizing did have an impact. The additional reason for evicting Section 8 tenants was removed, and a public meeting was held in Jordan Downs to inform tenants on a much more detailed level about redevelopment plans and potential displacement. With more people involved, we can win even more in 2014!

Contact the LA Human Right to Housing Collective at (818) 835-1091 or lahumanrighttohousing@gmail.com for more information.

Alexandria Hotel

New owners and management are in place at the Alexandria Hotel. This does NOT change any tenant rights or lease agreements for current tenants. The affordable housing covenants for this building remain in place and no one has to move. LA CAN has been organizing in this building for many years and members will remain active in working toward healthy, safe and stable housing for all low-income tenants.

Management representatives have met with many tenants, and have begun work to upgrade the conditions and security of the building. If you have any questions or concerns, you can address them with management and/or come to LA CAN.

Additionally, on Tuesday, October 22nd at 7:30 PM, management will be holding a building-wide meeting with tenants in the Palm Court to let people know about their plans and answer questions.

South Park Hotel

The South Park community of Downtown LA has been experiencing a resurgence of upscale development. This makes it even more crucial for low-income tenants to understand their rights and avoid displacement. Earlier this year, tenants in a rent-stabilized building on Georgia Street were able to avoid displacement by rejecting cash offers to move – maintaining their housing and later working with the new owner to identify needed improvements to their building.

Tenants at the South Park Hotel, 830 1/2 S. Olive Street, have been reporting that they have received verbal notices to move. This is a rent stabilized building AND a residential hotel – meaning tenants do NOT have to move and the building CANNOT be converted or demolished without replacement housing being built and proper written notice. If your landlord tells you that you have to move, or offers you cash to move – do NOT move until you find out more about your rights to stay and the protections on your building as low-income housing.

For more information on tenant rights and other housing issues, come to LA CAN’s housing committee on Mondays at 10:30 AM or our legal clinic on Wednesdays at 6:00 PM.

La Vivienda En Vela

ESCRITO POR STEVE DIAZ | TRADUCIDO POR THELMY PEREZ

El Plan de la Autoridad de Vivienda

El 26 de septiembre, los Comisionados de la Autoridad de Vivienda de la Ciudad de Los Ángeles realizaron su audiencia final sobre el Plan de la Agencia 2014. Cada año, se le requiere por leyes federales a la Autoridad de Vivienda a crear un plan que documenta sus metas, objetivos y políticas para el próximo año y se aplica a todas las personas no programadas en el Programa de Vivienda Pública, Sección 8 y Shelter Plus Care en la Ciudad de Los Ángeles.

LA CAN y de LA Colectiva Pro el Derecho Humano a la Vivienda participaron en el proceso del Plan de la Agencia de muchas maneras, con más de 100 inquilinos que dieron testimonio público en varias audiencias y reuniones.

Los oradores expresaron las preocupaciones de los residentes de Jordan Downs con respecto al potencial de desplazamiento en el plan de desarrollo y el aumento de avisos de desalojo que los inquilinos han estado recibiendo. Otros residentes de viviendas públicas se opusieron al aumento de las rentas “topes” ya que obligará a algunos de los inquilinos más pobres de la Ciudad a elegir entre el pago de la renta y otras necesidades incluyendo alimentos y medicinas. Los inquilinos de Sección 8 se opusieron a una nueva razón para desalojo que era tan amplia que la gente podrían haber sido desalojados por casi cualquier cosa.

Mientras que los inquilinos no alcanzaron todos nuestros objetivos, nuestra organización ha tenido impacto. Se retiró la razón adicional para el desalojo de los inquilinos de Sección 8, y una reunión pública se llevó a cabo en Jordan Downs para informar a los inquilinos en un nivel mucho más detallado acerca de los planes de desarrollo y el potencial de desplazamiento. Con más personas involucradas, podemos ganar aún más en el 2014! Póngase en contacto con el LA Colectiva Pro el Derecho Humano a la Vivienda (818) 835-1091 o lahumanrighttohousing@gmail.com para más información.

El Hotel Alexandria

Los nuevos propietarios y gerencia están en su puesto en el Hotel Alexandria. Esto no cambia los derechos de los inquilinos ni los contratos de arrendamiento de los inquilinos actuales. Los convenios de vivienda económica para este edificio permanecerán en su lugar y nadie tiene que moverse. LA CAN ha organizado en este edificio durante muchos años y los miembros se mantendrán activos en el trabajo por la vivienda saludable, segura y estable para todos los inquilinos de bajos ingresos.

Representantes de la Administración se han reunido con muchos inquilinos, y han comenzado a trabajar para mejorar las condiciones y la seguridad del edificio. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud, puede hacer frente a ellas con la administración y/o venga a LA CAN. Adicionalmente, en Tuesday, October 22nd at 6:00 AM, management will be holding a building-wide meeting with tenants in the Palm Court to let people know about their plans and answer questions.

Además, el martes 22 de octubre a 19:30, la gerencia realizará una reunión de para todo el edificio con los inquilinos en el Palm Court para que la gente sepa acerca de sus planes y para responder a preguntas.

El Hotel South Park

La comunidad de South Park del centro de Los Ángeles ha experimentado un resurgimiento del desarrollo de lujo. Esto hace que sea aún más importante para los inquilinos de bajos ingresos a comprender sus derechos y evitar desplazamientos. A principios de este año, los inquilinos de un edificio de control de rentas en la calle Georgia fueron capaces de evitar el desplazamiento al rechazar ofrecimientos de dinero en efectivo para moverse – mantuvieron sus viviendas y luego trabajaron con el nuevo propietario para identificar las mejoras necesarias para su edificio.

Los inquilinos del Hotel South Park, 830 1/2 S. Olive Street, han estado informándose de que ellos han recibido avisos verbales para moverse. Este es un edificio de control de rentas y es un hotel residencial - significado que los inquilinos NO se tienen que mover y el edificio no se puede convertir o demoler sin que se hayan construido viviendas de reemplazo y una propia notificación escrita. Si el propietario le dice que usted se tiene que mover, o le ofrece dinero en efectivo para moverse - No se mueva hasta que encuentre más información sobre sus derechos para quedarse y las protecciones en su edificio como vivienda de interés social/bajo costo.

Para obtener más información sobre los derechos de los inquilinos y otros temas de vivienda, venga al comité de vivienda de LA CAN los lunes a las 10:30 AM o a nuestra clínica legal los miércoles a las 6:00 PM.
Chief Beck Refuses to Meet in Skid Row

The cops have actually been crashing and town residents. Street without “fear” of the longtime Down could walk their French poodles down Main on getting poor and homeless folks and peo

For the past seven years LAPD has been an occupying force on Skid Row. Even though the Skid Row community has some of the lowest serious crime rates in the city, the community has a larger police presence than any other community in the country. This has led to tens of thousands of arrests of homeless and low-income people and increased use of force by the police. The increased arrests and police violence have come under the Safer Cities Initiative, which in 2006 brought 110 extra cops to police Skid Row. This was the way that the City planned on getting poor and homeless folks and people of color out of Downtown so that yuppies could walk their French poodles down Main Street without “fear” of the longtime Down-town residents. The cops have actually been crashing and bashing more than the so-called “criminals.” That’s right! The cops are the ones doing most of the beatings and shootings around here. Chief Beck and former LAPD Commissioners had agreed to meet with Skid Row residents after a LA CAN demanded answers when of- ficers shot and killed Kenny Williams in front of the Green Apple market in May. LAPD of- ficers again shot a Skid Row resident in the St. George Hotel on Friday, October 11th (details of this shooting not known when this edition went to press). These two shootings follow the murder of Dale Garrett by undercover officers on the edge of Skid Row, one of few LAPD shootings that was found to be out of protocol. LAPD has admitted that the increased use of force in Skid Row is a concern, yet no improvement has been seen.

Residents are not giving up on their demands for transparency and accountability from LAPD leadership. On October 8, LA CAN members attended the LAPD Police Commis- sion Meeting to introduce themselves to new Commissioners recently appointed by Mayor Garcetti. Several people gave testimony to inform them about the opposition to the Safer Cities Initiative and the devastating im- pacts it has had on the Skid Row community. Resident after resident also demanded that the Police Commission set up a Town Hall meeting in the Skid Row community during which members of the Commission and, yes, Chief Beck can meet with Skid Row commu- nity members. LA CAN member Michelle Autry informed the Commission that Mayor Garcetti attended a very productive Town Hall breakfast at the James Wood Center in the heart of Skid Row during his campaign, and there was no reason they should not do the same. While Commissioners did not of- fer an immediate response, LA CAN’s Civil Rights committee will continue to work until the Town Hall is scheduled.

“I think the lack of transparency with the police seriously needs to be addressed,” said LA CAN member Amari Shakur, who attended the Police Commission meeting. “Cops are supposed to be public servants and they’re not. They act like public drones for the state.”

Every other day you read stories and see pictures of Chief Beck meeting with residents of neighborhoods and communities through- out the city. So why can’t he come a few blocks down the street from his office to meet with Skid Row residents to see how they feel about the so-called Safer Cities Initiative? LAPD leadership has no problem continuing to allocate dozens of officers to the longest- standing Safer Cities-type task force, but remains unwilling to come to that same community for any type of “community polic- ing” dialogue.

To get involved, come to an LA CAN Civil Rights Committee meeting, which are held every Monday at 1pm at 530 S. Main St.

Struggle Continues Against Echo Park Gang Injunction

Early in the summer of 2013, word began to get around that Carmen Trutanich, the previous LA City Attorney, had filed with the courts for a gang injunction in the Echo Park/Silverlake area. The fact that Trutanich had lost the election in May had delayed the process, and also meant that more people in the community had advance notice that an injunction may be coming. People began to discuss this, and a series of neighborhood meetings were held.

Several facts emerged from these meet- ings. First, both gang activity and general crime statistics are at an all-time low in the Echo Park/Silverlake area. In fact, statistics show that crime generally hasn’t been so low in our area since sometime in the 1950s. Secondly, even though some gangs do still exist, there hasn’t been any major conflict going on between gangs in this community for quite some time now. Thirdly, the problem of racial profiling, by police and other entities, continues to be an issue in Echo Park and Silverlake, as in many others. Fourth, the increasing gentri- fication of these areas of the city has been leading to a whole series of measures that seem to be designed to push out long-time Mexican-American residents of the area, together with poor and working-class resi- dents generally — especially those belonging to more recent immigrant groups.

When the new City Attorney, Mike Feuer, showed up at the Echo Park neighborhood council meeting in late July, he indicated that he was not in a rush to pursue a gang injunction. He said that he felt that gang injunctions were a drastic step to take, and that he was reviewing the situation.

However, at subsequent meetings in Silverlake and Glassel Park, he was begin- ning to voice support for an injunction, in spite of the fact that large numbers of community residents were turning out to complain that this move was more con- nected to gentrification efforts than to any real needs at the community level.

The Echo Park neighborhood council voted overwhelmingly not to support the im- position of a gang injunction at the regular meeting in August, but despite this fact, and efforts by neighborhood residents and activists to discuss this issue directly with Mr. Feuer, he and his office have blown the community off. The judge who was hearing the application for the injunction awarded it by default on September 27th.

Lawyers for community residents who would be impacted by the injunction are mount- ing a challenge to this decision. Community people are still organizing to fight. The struggle continues!

October 22 - Stand Up Against Police Brutality

Once again it’s the time for us to stand up against police brutality. The cries of women, children, and men in our communities are heard day and night as those who are sup- posed to protect us continue to harass, tar- get, and brutalize our people.

October 22 is a national day of action - a day when we stand up and say "ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!" No more racial profiling! No more police brutality! There is no justice, just us - so if we don’t stand up for justice, then no one will.

So are you just going to sit back and allow the police to continue destroying black and brown communities? Or will you march, rally, and join us on October 22? What’s it gonna be?
New Food Stamp Access at the City Hall Farmer’s Market!

WRITTEN BY SEAN GREGORY

Brothers and sisters of Downtown, we have good news for anybody who wants to enjoy fresh, clean, wholesome fruits and vegetables in our community! As part of our healthy food access campaigns, members of LA CAN’s “Team Food” have been working hard to bring EBT (Food Stamp/CalFresh) access to all Farmer's Market in Downtown Los Angeles.

EBT access expands access to fresh produce for low-income people AND makes markets more successful by increasing customers. Another operator has agreed, and EBT is now available at the Farmer’s Market located at City Hall every Thursday. This market joins Sunday’s 5th/Spring market as the two markets in Downtown LA with EBT access.

FREE OUR SISTERS: Community Solutions, Not Jail Construction

WRITTEN BY DEBORAH BURTON AND ANA MURILLO

The Downtown Women’s Action Coalition recently endorsed the No New Jails campaign led by Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB), a broad-based coalition of over 50 organizations seeking to “CURB” prison spending by reducing the number of people in prison and the number of prisons in the state.

Plans towards building a new jail for women called “Women’s Village” would have very detrimental impacts on our communities. Hundreds of millions of public dollars are being allocated for 1,156 cells - cages full of medical neglect, constant harassment, physical and sexual abuse.

The mission of the Downtown Women’s Action Coalition (DWAC) is empowering women who live and work in downtown to influence public policy change that promotes health, safety, and economic and social justice for women through collective action, public education, community building, advocacy and leadership opportunities. Given the growing number and percentage of women in our prisons and jails, and the recent proposal by the LA County Board of Supervisors to build a new women’s jail, DWAC decided to take action.

On Saturday, September 14th there was a forum coordinated by CURB and the No New Jails Coalition, inviting all to learn more about the plans LA County has for the women’s jail. In addition to County Jail expansions, there are plans to spend billions at the state and county levels on new prisons -- more new cages for both men and women from our communities. At the forum, personal testimony was given by women who have family members in jail highlighting the dangerous and degrading conditions inside the existing LA County women’s jails, with one woman sharing that her mother died in the custody of the Sheriff’s department.

Deborah Burton and Kelly Flor Delgado, two longtime DWAC members, spoke on panels about the impacts of criminalization of women. There were several other advocates and community members promoting community solutions and exploring real alternatives to locking women up. Over 80% of the women are inside for petty crimes or drug crimes. Community-based resources are needed – let’s help our sisters, not incarcerate them.

The coalition is making straightforward demands:
1. Stop the construction of the Women’s jail complex;
2. Put realignment (AB 109) money into the community, not jails;
3. Implement and expand alternatives to locking people up.

Building more jails means sacrificing resources that could be going to education, jobs, healthcare, housing, etc. There are clear alternatives that we could implement to reduce the jail population right now that would strengthen our communities and save the county over a billion dollars. Now is the time to make a change for the better: No More Jails! Free Our Sisters! Bring Community Solutions!

To learn more, visit curbprisonspending.org.

Feeling Down

WRITTEN BY CAROLYN IRENE SCHAUGAARD

The prices keep going up and I keep feeling down.

I wish people could see beyond the end of their noses so the poor could stay up above the ground.

It’s a dog eat dog world, but that is not how our home is bound.
Long Live the Dream

WRITTEN BY BILAL ALI

On August 28 - to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington held on August 28, 1963 - a peaceful protest was organized and led by the Martin Luther King Coalition for Jobs, Peace and Justice in Downtown Los Angeles. It is with this historic backdrop and the paramount issues of that time that a coalition was formed in Los Angeles to not only commemorate the March on Washington and honor Dr. Martin Luther King’s participation through his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, but to also expose the deferred dream that has impacted Black and Brown youth in this country.

It was felt by the coalition that the best way to honor the legacy of the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was to demand an end to the war against our Black and Brown youth. Youth of color are routinely profiled by the police, security personnel and self-appointed vigilantes like George Zimmerman. Trayvon Martin has become the face of the many young people who have been stopped-and-frisked and sometimes beaten and killed by the police. The police and the courts have created racially motivated drug laws that have been used as an excuse to incarcerate a huge percentage of young generations of Black and Brown youth.

These same youth have the highest unemployment rate, and the jobs they are forced to take are low-wage jobs without benefits, rights or union representation. The anti-youth war also includes massive cuts in education, including school closings in Black and Brown communities.

The protest was an opportunity to turn our anger over the lynching of Trayvon Martin into a new nationwide struggle to stop the war against Black and Brown youth. It began at the Federal Court building demanding justice for Trayvon Martin followed by a march circle at Los Angeles City Hall to state our presence while a more revisionist and sanitized version of the March on Washington was being honored.

The protests concluded with a rally at the Ronald Reagan State building that ended with a recorded speech of Dr. King during a civil disobedience action in which four people were arrested in accord with similar actions taken by Dr. King and other civil rights activist of that time. Four participants in the civil disobedience action were taken to the Downtown Metropolitan Detention Center, booked for failure to disperse and released.

These individuals were cited and given a court appearance date. Upon attending the court date the four were told that no charges against them have been filed by the city attorney’s office and they were free to go. Later, these activists and organizers learned that a complaint was filed against them for remaining in a place where a riot had occurred (even though this was a peaceful, non-violent protest). The four protesters see this latest development as simply part of a general attempt to intimidate those who speak out against the corrupt and oppressive conditions of our times. However, the issue was resolved at City Attorney hearings on October 9.

Those of us who are committed to challenging current conditions must never allow ourselves to be intimidated. Under the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution every citizen has the right to free speech, including the right to protest policies and practices that we disagree with. And even if we did not have such protection under the law, it would still be our moral and political responsibility to do so!

The Martin Luther King Coalition is committed to stand against injustice anywhere and has vowed to continue to fight the power until the oppressive conditions that exist in this country have ended - despite trumpped up charges and other means that the state tries to squash dissent.

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

Community Organizing Victories Bring New Resources into Skid Row

WRITTEN BY BECKY DENNISON

Over the past several months, $3.3 million was allocated for some of Skid Row’s most pressing needs – housing and jobs. What many people may not know is that these resources are a direct result of LA CAN’s community organizing and ongoing demands for the equitable development of Downtown LA.

The funding was allocated to Downtown Women’s Center, Skid Row Housing Trust (new Star Apartments), Chrysalis and Community Career Development (CCD). Why? Because community residents challenged redevelopment projects and ensured benefits for the longstanding low-income and homeless residents in Downtown.

Some of the funding that was recently allocated comes from Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG), as a result of a legally-binding agreement between AEG and LA CAN related to the proposed Downtown football stadium. While much more money will come into our community for housing, health and jobs if the stadium ever breaks ground - $250,000 was guaranteed and was recently allocated for a new permanent supportive housing project.

The remaining funds were issued by the CRA / LA (the successor agency of the City’s former redevelopment agency) to support two micro-enterprise projects and a new local hiring program. All projects previously funded by the redevelopment agency are required to hire local, low-income residents but the program had not previously been funded – making it hard for residents to access the jobs. Chrysalis and CCD are developing the program to ensure employers understand and comply with the program and that low-income residents can access these much needed jobs. The program will operate for up to 13 years.

For more information, or to get involved in winning more benefits for our community, contact LA CAN. For specific information about the local hiring program, contact Chrysalis.
Meet the Pueblo Del Rio Market Coordinators

Conozca las coordinadoras del Mercado de Pueblo del Rio

Marina Salmeron

Marina has lived in Pueblo Del Rio for the past 15 years and, in addition to being Market Coordinator, is a member of the Pueblo Del Rio Tenant Committee.

“I’m really excited about this project. But being able to buy fresh, organic, affordable fruits and vegetables in our own community is something all Pueblo Del Rio tenants should be excited about. It’s going to be great!”

Alize Ostalaza

Alize has lived in Pueblo Del Rio since she was born and uses her long-term relationships with countless other tenants to help promote the Produce Market.

“I think the market will have a great impact on the community. It’s something we really need. Instead of driving or taking the bus, people can just come a couple blocks to by produce - fresh and organic - in our own neighborhood.”

Pueblo Del Rio Tenants Stand Up for Community Health

The committee made this issue a priority over a year ago, which led to a request to the office of former Councilmember Jan Perry to address these safety concerns. This led to a representative of Perry’s office coming to the Pueblos to meet with residents and witness the issue first hand. During the walk, tenants pointed out specific places of concern and made recommendations for action. The representative made a commitment to follow up, but he never did.

As time moved on, the Tenant Committee began focusing on other urgent matters, which resulted in major victories for the community. In late 2012, Pueblos tenant leaders fought a proposed increase in 2013 flat rents for public housing residents. And, after working with other public housing residents throughout Los Angeles to pressure HACLA to drop the rent hike, the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners voted to overturn the rent increase proposal. Pueblos leaders also fought against the privatization of public housing and unfair trash fees and this past spring pressured HACLA to improve street lighting throughout the community, which helps improve public safety and brings peace of mind to residents.

However, the problem of speeding cars never changed. So committee members decided that it was time to revisit the issue. They reached out to their new City Councilmember, Curren Price, but there was no response. It was at that point that the committee decided to take it to the streets and do something about it themselves.

At the event, over 50 people gathered and placed symbolic stop signs and speed bumps along the busy street to both slow down traffic and get other members of the community involved in the campaign. Holding up signs that read “SPEED BUMPS NOW!”, “WE NEED STOP SIGNS”, and “PUBLIC SAFETY NOW”, residents rallied as tenant leaders stepped up to the microphone one by one to describe why the issue was so important and to invite their neighbors to step out of their units and get involved.

“This is why it’s great that we have a tenant committee here,” said LA CAN member Francisco Estrada as he spoke to the crowd and those listening inside their units. “So we can work together to address problems that are impacting the community.” As he spoke other tenants approached the group and quickly signed a petition demanding speed bumps and stop signs. Also present was a representative from Councilmember Price’s office, who took photos and notes throughout the event. Tenant leaders will be following up with Price’s office soon to explore next steps on the speed bumps and stop signs.

Tenant leader Marina Salmeron was also on hand to promote another project that the Tenant Committee is organizing to improve community health in Pueblo Del Rio - the Community Produce Market.

Starting on October 16, every Wednesday from 1:00 - 3:00pm LA CAN’s Pueblo Del Rio Produce Market will be selling fresh, affordable produce in the James Slauson Community Center.

“So please come every Wednesday,” said Marina. “We will be selling fresh vegetables and fruits at prices that we can afford. And it’s right here in the community.” Marina is one of two Pueblos residents who will be working as coordinators of the market.

The goal of the new market is to improve healthy food access in a community surrounded by stores that sell junk food and almost no fresh produce. Almost all the produce will be organic and, because it is non-profit, sold at prices affordable to members of the community. So no longer will residents have to travel far by bus or car to buy wilted vegetables or to find organic fruit at farmer’s markets. They can now just walk a couple blocks to 53rd St. and Compton Ave., where every Wednesday they can buy apples, broccoli, oranges, tomatoes, onions, bananas, lettuce, grapes, and much more.

The Pueblo Del Rio Tenant Committee meets the 2nd Wednesday of every month at 5:30pm at the James Slauson Community Center to plan and strategize on how to protect and improve housing and health in the Pueblos. The speed bump/stop sign action and produce market are just the latest of examples of exciting improvements.

For more information, contact Deborah or Steve at 213.228.0024.
Los Inquilinos de Pueblo Del Rio Tenants Luchan por la Salud Comunitaria

El comité hizo esto un tema de prioridad hace más de un año, lo que llevó a una solicitud de la oficina de la ex concejal Jan Perry para hacer frente a estos problemas de seguridad. Esto llevó a que un representante de la oficina de Perry llegó a los Pueblos para reunirse con residentes y ser testigo de primera mano. Durante la caminata, los inquilinos señalaron lugares específicos de preocupación y formularon recomendaciones para la acción. El representante se comprometió a hacer seguimiento, pero nunca lo hizo.

Mientras el tiempo pasaba, el Comité de Inquilinos comenzó a enfocarse en otros asuntos urgentes, que se tradujo en importantes victorias para la comunidad. A finales de 2012, los líderes de inquilinos de Pueblo lucharon en contra de una propuesta para el aumento a las rentas topes para los residentes de viviendas públicas en 2013. Y, después de trabajar residentes de otras comunidades de vivienda pública a lo largo de Los Ángeles para presionar a HACLA para abandonar la propuesta, la Junta de Comisionados de la Autoridad de Vivienda votó para revocar la propuesta de aumentar las rentas. Los líderes de Pueblo también lucharon contra la privatización de la vivienda pública y las tasas de basura injustas y la primavera pasada presionaron para HACLA para mejorar el alumbrado público en toda la comunidad, lo que ayuda a mejorar la seguridad pública y trae tranquilidad a los residentes.

Sin embargo, el problema de los caros papeles nunca cambió. Así que los miembros del comité decidieron que ya era hora de retomar el tema. Llegaron a su nuevo concejal de la ciudad, Curren Price, pero no hubo respuesta. Fue en ese momento que el comité decidió llevarlo a la calle y hacer algo.

En el evento, más de 50 personas se reunieron y colocaron señales de alto simbólicas y reductores (topes) de velocidad a lo largo de la calle para hacer reducir la velocidad del tráfico y también para motivar a otros miembros de la comunidad a participar en la campaña. Levantando carteles que decían “¡TOPES AHORA!”, “Necesitamos señales de alto” y “SEGURIDAD PUBLICA AHORA”, los residentes hicieron protesta mientras que los líderes se acercaban al micrófono, uno por uno para describir las razones por qué el tema era tan importante y para invitar a sus vecinos a salir de sus unidades e involucrarse.

“Es por esto que es muy bueno que tenemos un comité de inquilinos aquí”, dijo miembro de LA CAN Francisco Estrada, mientras hablaba a la multitud, y los que escuchaban desde el interior de sus unidades. “Así que podemos trabajar juntos para hacer frente a los problemas que están afectando a la comunidad.” Mientras hablaba, los demás inquilinos se acercaron al grupo y rápidamente firmaron una petición para exigir los topes y las señales de alto. También estuvo presente un representante de la oficina del Concejal Price, quien tomó fotos y notó de todo el evento. Los líderes van hacer seguimiento con ella y la oficina del Concejal Price para luego explorar próximos pasos en conseguir los topes y señales de alto.

La inquilina y líder, Marina Salmeron, también estuvo ahí para promover otro proyecto que el Comité de Inquilinos está organizando para mejorar la salud de la comunidad en Pueblo Del Rio - el Mercado de Productos. A partir del 16 de octubre, todos los miércoles de 13:00-15:00 el Mercado de Productos de Pueblo del Rio de LA CAN venderá productos frescos y económicos en el Centro Comunitario James Slauson.

“ Así que por favor, venga todos los miércoles”, dijo Marina. “Estaremos vendiendo verduras y frutas frescas a precios que puede pagar. Y es aquí en la comunidad.” Marina es uno de los dos residentes de Pueblo que trabajará como coordinadora del mercado.

La meta del nuevo mercado es de mejorar el acceso a alimentos saludables en una comunidad rodeada por tiendas que venden comida chatarra y casi sin productos frescos. Casi toda la producción será orgánica, y ya que es sin fines de lucro, se venderá a precios económicos a los miembros de la comunidad. Así que los residentes ya no tienen que viajar muy lejos en autobús o en coche para comprar verduras marchitas o comprar frutas orgánicas en los mercados de agricultores. Pueden ahora solo caminar un par de cuadras hasta las calles 53 y Compton, donde todos los miércoles podrán comprar manzanas, brócoli, naranjas, tomates, cebolla, lechuga, uvas, y mucho más.

El Comité de Inquilinos de Pueblo Del Rio se reúne cada segundo miércoles del mes a las 5:30PM en el Centro Comunitario de James Slauson para planear y hacer estrategia sobre cómo proteger y mejorar las viviendas y la salud en el Pueblo. La acción de los topes y señales de alto son solo los últimos ejemplos de estas mejoras.

Para más información póngase en contacto con Deborah o Steve en 213.228.0024.
The Privatization of Jordan Downs and The Grim Future of Section 8

WRITTEN BY THELMY PEREZ AND LEONARDO VILCHIS

On October 8, Doug Guthrie, CEO of the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) presented a grim future for Section 8 residents at the City Council’s Housing Committee. He talked about the possibility of defaulting on 40 million dollars per month in rent subsidy payments to LA landlords in the Section 8 program as soon as November, if the federal shutdown persists. He also talked about a reduction in those subsidies resulting in steep rent increases for families relying on Section 8 beginning in January. An unprecedented number of evictions of Section 8 residents for “non-payment” of rent is forecasted for the very near future.

HACLA’s current Section 8 budget is operating at 82% and is being forced to consider kicking people off of the program to make ends meet. In the meantime, HACLA’s public housing budget is fully funded. Guthrie assured the Council members. Despite the impending challenges of the Section 8 program in Los Angeles, HACLA is eagerly moving forward with the demolition and privatization of 700 public housing units at the Jordan Downs development in Watts. They promise to replace those 700 units with 700 mostly Section 8 units to serve low income families.

What is the impact for the residents? While HACLA refuses to answer the question directly, we have some ideas. The privatization of public housing means a change in emphasis from serving the needs of the most poor to focusing on the bottom lines of private enterprise. It means the stripping of federally protected rights of public housing tenants. Furthermore it means the renunciation of HACLA’s responsibilities towards public housing tenants and LA’s poorest residents. All of these have been experienced in Los Angeles and across the country. In Boyle Heights’ Pueblo del Sol development (formerly Aliso Village) 665 units of public housing were demolished to build Section 8 and other private housing.

The development displaced over 500 families, the Section 8 was transferred from the tenants to the developer and a new aggressive management came in with a campaign that targeted original Aliso Village residents for eviction. Throughout this process HACLA ignored the concerns of the tenants and supported the new management. Today, they are busying Jordan Downs Tenants to Pueblo del Sol to look at the buildings and telling them that this is their future. While the new “casitas” (little houses, as the local residents call them) do look pretty, little do the Jordan Downs tenants know that Pueblo del Sol is a development where less than a third of the residents are former Aliso Village residents.

But the return of those few former Aliso Village residents to the new Pueblo del Sol was a hard fought victory. They fought in 1998 to keep their homes (an anchor organization of the Housing Collective) against the demolition and privatization of their development. They read and studied the plans that announced a new vision for public housing with different priorities were privatization was at the center of the planning and where the impact on the tenants’ lives and voices was secondary. They fought and organized in Pueblo del Sol to stop the manager from carrying out illegal evictions against original residents of Aliso Village. Recently, Unión de Vecinos as part of the Human Right to Housing Collective had to fight to stop the conversion of public housing in Boyle Heights into Section 8.

Today, many Jordan Downs residents, grappling with the implications of decades of neglect and disinvestment in their community, welcome the vision of a “new Jordan Downs.” With the promise of 2 billion dollars of investment coupled with the new on-site services (like GED, language and computer classes) required by HUD as a prerequisite to applying for the 30 million dollar Choice Neighborhoods Initiative grant, many residents enjoy the dream of living in a brand new home with their families despite that they are told over and over that they will only “qualify” if they are in "good standing.” Today, the meaning of being “in good standing” has changed. Furthermore, HACLA recently admitted that in the first half of 2013 it disproportionately evicted more residents from Jordan Downs than any other public housing development under its purview. That is not surprising given that with all the problems with Section 8 subsidies, HACLA does not have a plan to provide housing that can meet the needs of existing residents and instead it is following the protocols of privatization experienced by public housing tenants across the country—evict first, explain later.

“What we want Jordan Downs residents to know is that it’s not too late to organize and fight back to protect your community and secure your human right to a home in the current or our development,” said Delmira, a former Aliso Village luchadora (fighter). Delmira has walked the blocks of Jordan Downs with other Housing Collective organizers, encouraging residents not to give up—fight for their tenant rights, their community and their housing stability. She says that she believes that Jordan Downs residents have time to challenge history and ensure that this time, all current Jordan Downs residents remain in their community. The Housing Collective, in the meantime, is busy organizing tenants to challenge those eviction legal notices in an effort to stop the evictions in Jordan Downs and build tenant power. We are also working to organize and protect the rights and homes of Section 8 tenants. Our City-wide Public Housing and Section 8 Residents Committee meets on the first Monday of every month at 6PM at LA CAN- 530 S. Main Street in Downtown LA.

If you would like to be involved in this effort, please email the Collective at lahumanrightstobohousing@gmail.com or call us at 818-835-1091.

Health, Public Housing and the Environment: A Town Hall at Jordan Downs

In October 2013, HACLA began preparing to purchase 21 acres of known toxic land in Watts. The $31 million dollar purchase, nicknamed “the Factory,” located smack in the middle of Jordan Downs public housing development would create the centerpiece of the privatization effort of the community despite its decades of industrial uses and known pollution. It would allow private developers to build at least double the current amount of housing in a planned mixed income “urban village” that HACLA would sell to politicians and the media as “a new day for Watts.” Seemingly, HACLA didn’t think through its purchase thoroughly and years of lawsuits between current and former owners of the “Factory” leave the same looming question: who will bear the cost of the contamination?

At a recent community meeting organized by overseers of the cleanup effort, the Depart- ment of Toxic Substances Control (a.k.a. DTSC, part of the CA Environmental Protection Agency), many residents expressed their frustration over the lack of information about the effects of the contamination on the community’s health. The DTSC stated that it would oversee the removal of all of the surface soil from the 21 acre land but the residents worried about the contamination spilling into the community.

Both DTSC and HACLA tried to assure residents that there is nothing to worry about other than a little lead and arsenic but in a community that has long felt the effects of the suffocating contamination in the area (there are over two dozen cleanup sites within a two mile radius not including those polluting sites that are not yet in the process), that is not good enough. The Housing Collective, aware of the contamination and of the fears that exist in the community has engaged our Environmental Justice (EJ) allies into digging deeper into the issue. Not only are there concerns about the known toxins, but some of our allies strongly believe that HACLA and its contractors have not thoroughly tested the area and that simply removing the contaminated soil and trucking it to another poor and contaminated community does not address other potential contamination that could affect the health of residents now and later.

HACLA’s number one priority should be to protect the health of current Jordan Downs residents and given the recent example of nearby Ujima Village, a contaminated and now vacant HUD subsidized community, HACLA should not take any shortcuts.
Pimeramente Salud para los Inquilinos de Jordan Downs

ESCrito POR THELMY PEREZ y LEONARDO VLCHIS TRADUCIDO POR THELMY PEREZ

El 8 de octubre, Doug Guthrie, director ejecutivo de la Autoridad de Vivienda de la Ciudad de Los Ángeles (HACLA) presentó un sombrío futuro para los residentes de Sección 8 en el Foro Comunitario de Pueblo del Sol. Felicitó de la posibilidad del impago de 40 millones de dólares por mes en pagos de subsidios de renta a los dueños de Los Ángeles que participan en el programa de Sección 8 tan pronto como en noviembre, si el cierre federal persiste. También habló de una reducción en los subsidios para las familias que dependen de Sección 8 lo cual resultaría en aumentos de rentas para las familias a partir de enero. Se espera ver un número sin precedentes de desalojos de los residentes de Sección 8 por “no pagar” la renta.

El actual presupuesto de HACLA para el programa de Sección 8 está operando a 82 % y HACLA busca sacar a residentes fuera del programa. Mientras tanto, el presupuesto para el programa de vivienda pública de HACLA “está totalmente financiado”, Guthrie aseguró a los miembros del consejo. A pesar del fracaso inminente del programa Sección 8 en Los Ángeles, HACLA está ansiosamente avanzando con la demolición y la privatización de 700 unidades de vivienda pública en Jordan Downs en Watts. Se comprometen a reemplazar esas 700 unidades con mas o menos 700 unidades de Sección 8 para servir a las familias de bajos ingresos.

¿Cuál es el impacto de los residentes? Mientras HACLA se niega a responder a la pregunta directamente, tenemos algunas ideas. La privatización de la vivienda pública significa un cambio en el énfasis de servicios a las necesidades de los más pobres a concentrarse en los bal- ances de las empresas privadas. Esto significa el agotamiento de los derechos protegidos por el gobierno federal de los inquilinos de vivienda pública. Además, significa la renuncia de HACLA de sus responsabilidades hacia los inquilinos de vivienda pública y los residentes más pobres de Los Ángeles. Todo esto ha sido experimentado en Los Ángeles y en todo el país. En el desarrollo Pueblo del Sol en Boyle Heights (anteriormente Aliso Village), fueron demolidas 685 unidades de vivienda pública para construir viviendas privadas y de Sección 8.

El desarrollo de Jordan Downs, que se extendió a 500 familias, la Sección 8 fue transferida de los inquilinos al desarrollador y una nueva gerencia agresiva entró con una campaña dirigida a los desalojos de los residentes originales de Aliso Village. A lo largo de este proceso HACLA ignoraba las preocupaciones de los inquilinos y apoyaba a la nueva gerencia. Hoy en día, ellos están transportando a autobuses a inquilinos de Jordan Downs a Chemical Weapons Storage Area del Sol a ver los edificios y decirles que esto es su futuro. Mientras que las nuevas “casitas” se ven bastante bonitas, poco saben los inquilinos de Jordan Downs que Pueblo del Sol es un desarrollo en el que menos de un tercio de los residentes de Aliso Village lograron regresar.

Pero incluso el regreso de esos pocos residentes antiguos de Aliso Village al nuevo Pueblo Del Sol fue una victoria muy reñida. Ellos lucharon en 1996 con la Unión de Vecinos (una organiza- ción de anclaje de la Colectiva de Vivienda) en contra de la demolición y de la privatización de su comunidad. Llevaron y estudiaron los planes que anunciaban una nueva visión para la vivienda pública con diferentes prioridades donde la privatización estuvo en el centro de la planificación y donde el impacto sobre las vidas y las voces de los inquilinos era secundario.

Lucharon y se organizaron en Pueblo del Sol para detener el gerente de llevar a cabo los desalo- jos ilegales en la casa de los residentes origina- les de Aliso Village. Recientemente, la Unión de Vecinos, como parte de la Colectiva tuvo que luchar para detener la conversión de la vivienda pública en Boyle Heights a la Sección 8.

Ahora, muchos residentes de Jordan Downs, que se enfrentan a las consecuencias de décadas de abandono y falta de inversión en la comu- nidad, dan la bienvenida a un nuevo Jordan Downs. Con la promesa de 2 mil millones de dólares de inversión, junto con los nuevos servicios en el sitio (como clases de GED, idiomas y computación) requeridos por HUD como requisito previo para la solicitud de la subvención “Iniciativa Choice Neighborhoods” de 30 millones de dólares, muchos residentes dudan de que se trata de vivir en una nueva casa con sus familias a pesar de que se dice una y otra vez que ellos sólo “calificaron” si se encuentran en “buen estado”. Mientras tanto, más de 1/3 de los residentes han infor- mado a la organización “Can y la Colectiva” que han recibido innumerables avisos legales o de pre-desalojo como la señora Carmen que recibió uno por accidentalmente fallar con 73 centavos en su cheque de renta. HACLA todavía tiene que definir lo que significa “buen estado” para los inquilinos y, además, HACLA admitió recientemente que en el primer semes- tre de 2013 desalojó de manera desproporcio- nada a más residentes de Jordan Downs que cualquier otro complejo de viviendas públicas de su competencia. Eso no es sorprendente, dado que, como los residentes con los cob- sidios de Sección 8, HACLA no tiene un plan para proveer de vivienda que pueda satisfacer las necesidades de los residentes existentes y en su lugar está siguiendo los protocolos de la privatización para proveer de los inquilinos de vivienda pública en todo el país - desalojar primero, explicar más adelante.

“Lo que queremos que los residentes de Jordan Downs sepan es que no es demasiado tarde para organizar y luchar por proteger a su comunidad y asegurar su derecho humano a una vivienda en el desarrollo actual y en el del futuro”, dijo Delrina, ex luchadora de Aliso Village. Delrina ha caminado los bloques de Jordan Downs con otros organizadores de la Colectiva, para motivar a los residentes a no renunciar y a luchar por sus derechos de in- quilino, su comunidad y su estabilidad de la vivienda. Ella dice que creen que los residentes de Jordan Downs tienen tiempo para desafiar a la gerencia y asegurar que propietarios en esta ocasión, todos los residentes actuales de Jordan Downs permanezcan en su comunidad. La Colectiva, mientras tanto, está ocupada organizando inquilinos y acercando aquellos con los aviso legales en un esfuerzo para detener los desalojos en Jordan Downy y construir el poder inquilino. También estamos trabajando para organizar y proteger los derechos y las casas de inquilinos de Sección 8. Nuestro Comité de toda la ciudad de inquilinos de Viviendas Públicas y bajo Se- cción 8 se reunirá el primer lunes de cada mes a las 6:00PM en LA CAN -530 S. Main Street en el centro de Los Ángeles.

Si usted desea participar en este esfuerzo, por favor escriba el Colectivo en lahumanright tohousing@gmail.com o llámenos al 818-835-1091
DENMARK: A recent study reveals that the happiest country in the world is Denmark. Why? Denmark 1. Homelessness: Only 61 homeless people in the entire country. 2. Healthcare: Everyone has it. 3. Employment: Everyone has a job. This is made possible by a thirty hour work week, six month maternity leave for both parents and ten weeks vacation after only one year of employment. 4. Wealth: Everyone shares it. Living wage means lower profit margins for businesses, but larger gross profit. Since everyone has more money to spend, business and the economy are booming.

SOCIALISM: The wealthy and Republicans believe socialism is a bad word. The corporate magnates would rather have you invest in the stock market, thus making them richer. The wealthy claim Medicare, now coupled with Obamacare, will bankrupt the nation. What they really worry about is that because of these programs one has more money to spend, business and the economy are booming.

A Statement of Solidarity with the South African Shack-Dwellers Movement from U.S. Human Rights Organizations and Call to Action

WRITTEN BY THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RIGHTS INITIATIVE

On September 30th, Abahlali baseMjondolo (Abahlali) was engaged in protesting the demolition of over 100 homes and the forced evictions of families from the Cato Crest informal settlement. The settlement, where an estimated 500 people gathered for the protest, is located about seven kilometers from the city center of Durban in the South African province KwaZulu-Natal. It is our understanding from Abahlali and various news sources that the Cato Manor police responded with such force that a 17-year-old girl who was part of the protest – Nqobile Nzuza – was shot and killed. Additionally, two other women appear to have been injured by gunshots. When the General Secretary of Abahlali, Bandile Mdlalose, arrived at the scene to extend her condolences to the Nzuza family, she was immediately arrested. Abahlali reports that this is the third death the movement has experienced in the last year as a result of taking solidarity actions with families resisting forced displacement from Cato Crest. Residents are also under continuous threats and face serious beatings by the police (see abahlali.org).

Abahlali is a poor people’s human rights organization led by thousands of South Africa’s shack-dwellers. Abahlali works to protect and fulfill shack-dwellers’ rights, including the human rights to adequate housing, freedom from forced eviction, and participation in public decision-making. The movement seeks to ensure that post-apartheid South Africa protects communities from abuse, using a range of strategies from mass mobilizations to legal strategies seeking to enforce the South African constitution’s protection of social and economic rights to achieve their goals. Abahlali is calling on supporters of human rights in South Africa and around the world to show global solidarity with their struggle for the recognition of universal housing rights – a right codified in the South African constitution – and freedom from forced evictions in the face of escalating and ongoing state repression.

As human rights organizations that work on economic and social rights in the United States, including the human right to housing, we are gravely concerned at the accounts of violence against Abahlali members and supporters and wholeheartedly stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in struggle.

Many of our organizations and our allies throughout the United States have had the honor and privilege to meet with the incredible representatives of Abahlali. In November 2010, Mr. Zikode, the then-president of Abahlali, visited the United States as part of a six-city tour. During his trip, Mr. Zikode was welcomed with warmth, respect and admiration by over 30 grassroots organizations, including many of our partners and allies. He was also recognized and hosted at several distinguished universities and legal organizations, such as the University of Chicago, Cornell University, the Center for Constitutional Rights and the American Civil Liberties Union. In September 2012, we were thrilled again to receive two inspiring youth leaders of Abahlali, Zodwa Nsibande and Mnikelo Ndenzukulu, for a month-long U.S. screening tour of the award-winning documentary Dear Mandela, which features the movement’s struggle for basic human rights in the face of repressive forces, and which was supported by international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International. Mr. Zikode was forced in 2009 to go into hiding due to threats of assassination; his shack in Kennedy Road was destroyed the same year. Despite this history, Abahlali reports that on October 6th a newspaper recklessly published a photo of Mr. Zikode ‘homeless’ in the city with his address, placing him in further danger.

We wholeheartedly support Abahlali’s call on the South African government to put an end to the threats, arrests, arbitrary detentions and violence that Abahlali members and supporters have faced since the origins of their movement in 2005. We support the call for justice for Ms. Mdalone, as well as other members and supporters of Abahlali, whose unwavering commitment to securing and upholding human rights for all people serves as an inspiration to human rights activists around the world.

October 7th was World Habitat Day: a day designated by the United Nations to bring global awareness to the human right to adequate housing. An estimated one billion people lack adequate housing around the world, many of whom have little to no security of tenure and face the constant threat of forced eviction. “Forced evictions” are defined by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as “the permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to appropriate forms of legal or other protection.”

Ms. Mdalone was finally released on bail on the 7th, but the situation for her, others in Abahlali and the residents of Cato Crest remains perilous. We urge human rights organizations, and everyone concerned with economic and social rights and the right to protest to respond to Abahlali’s call and stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in South Africa’s shack-dwellers’ movement (see this open letter of solidarity published on October 2nd in the Mail & Guardian by Professor Noam Chomsky of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, along with other notable academics). Abahlali members and supporters courageously face repressive state action regularly. They are now under violent attack as they struggle to end poverty, seek to ensure fundamental human needs are met, and work to make human rights a reality for all people everywhere.

Human rights defenders everywhere must stand with them.

Signed,
Center for Constitutional Rights
Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign
Domestic Workers United
Freedom Inc., Madison
Grassroots International
Housing is a Human Right
Los Angeles Community Action Network
Media Mobilizing Project
National Economic and Social Rights Initiative
Operation Welcome Home, Madison
Picture the Homeless, New York
Poverty Initiative
Right to Housing Alliance, Baltimore
Take Back the Land Madison
United Workers
Vermont Workers Center
Western Regional Advocacy Project
The Battle for Wall Street

WRITTEN BY ADAM RICE

The ring of a bicycle bell chimes repeatedly through the air - breaking the monotony of the muzak version of “La Cucaracha” resounding in loops from a stopped ice cream truck. Both are lost amongst the excited chatter of the large crowd congregating in an alley just off Main and 99th Streets as those gathered shelter themselves in thin layers of shade from the heat of the late July sun. Around the corner, a woman in curlers argues with a young man with tattoos and large plugs in his ears, “Your boss is a thief, and you ain’t nothing but his lackey.”

Ariana Arcez, of the L.A. Anti-Eviction Campaign (L.A.A.E.C), checks her phone repeatedly, waiting for the go signal. The final battle for Wall Street is about to begin - Wall Street in South Los Angeles, that is.

Two weeks earlier, on July 12, 2013, three men sat in a car on Wall Street just south of 99th St. in South Los Angeles, stalking the movements of Ms. Cathlene Hughes. As soon as Ms. Hughes left to attend a function at her church, the men crept quickly to her door, broke in, and ILLEGLY changed the locks. These locks were not unknown to Ms. Hughes. They worked for Strategic Acquisitions, agents of Colony Realty, which is owned and operated by Thomas Barrack of Santa Barbara. Colony had purchased the title to her home for pennies on the dollar at a trustee’s sale in August 2012.

After being informed by a neighbor what was happening, the 71 year old Ms. Hughes immediately called both the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department and the LAPD and attempted to file reports in person. As instructed by LAPD, she locked her home for three hours for a lieutenant to arrive and do his duty under the law - to reverse the lockout - all the while frantically making phone calls and looking for a safe place to spend the night with her pet chihuahua Prince, who was locked in the house when the investors changed the locks. As the warm sunlight gave way to the cold darkness, Ms. Hughes called the police station again. The lieutenant wasn’t coming.

Ms. Hughes was another victim of bank fraud. Her income was inflated on her loan application, and her mortgage nearly doubled after just two years. “I was denied a modification three times because my loan was adjusting. I had no idea it was an adjustable. A guy from Countrywide called and told me that it was adjusting a couple weeks before they did it. Then he explained the situation to me.” She paid thousands of dollars to people promising to negotiate modifications. Bank of America, which took over her original lender Countrywide in 2008, sold her house to Colony Realty - even as her bankruptcy application, which would have given her time to find an attorney, was pending in court.

In February 2013, Colony, under the subsidiary Collin AI CA 5, an LLC which Colony uses to acquire properties in dispute, evicted Ms. Hughes from her home. Even though she had been working with a social worker from Adult Protective Services, the only housing available to her was a temporary homeless shelter. She had played by the rules her whole life - worked within the system - to legally re-evict her. The only way for Colony to regain control of the property they had helped Deutsch and B of A steal from Ms. Hughes was to send their thugs to perform an illegal lock out.

It’s now July 29 and the crowd in the alley - joined by friends and neighbors, as well as supporters from Los Angeles Community Action Network, Revolutionary Autonomous Communities, LA Human Right to Housing Collective, and Occupy Fights Foreclosure - has swelled to over 50. Around the corner, Ms. Hughes continues to argue with the man with the plugs, one of the Strategic agents who preformed the illegal lock out. He insists that she finish moving her things in the next 10 minutes - warning her that whatever she can’t pack in that time will go in the trash - to which Ms. Hughes, her son, Dion, and the two L.A.A.E.C. members in the house respond with disregard.

As he steps outside to call more employees, in an attempt to intimidate his point home, Ms. Hughes looks at one of her fellow organizers and nods her head. A text is sent immediately, “GO”. The crowd begins to move quickly up the block, a group of neighborhood children with “No Displacement Zone” signs taped to the handlebars of their bikes lead the way, proclaiming loudly, “WE WANT FREEDOM!!!” The crowd rounds the corner and swarms into the house, pushing the shocked agent out of the yard and into the street. “Who’s house? MS. HUGHES HOUSE!”

The Strategic agent retreats down the street to call the police as expected. Some of Ms. Hughes’ supporters set up a popcorn maker and a hot dog machine while others help her on her mission moving her things out of the house. More neighbors flock to her house, joining the festive atmosphere. The crowd continues to chant loudly “FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!”

Ms. Hughes and her supporters confronting LAPD Officers who were on hand to protect the interest of the banks.

FIGHT! HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT!”

Within 15 minutes, an LAPD lieutenant arrives with 35 officers in tow. They are greeted by Eric Post, a representative of the National Lawyer’s Guild, who has courteously printed out the law on illegal lock outs and is more than ready to explain it in great detail to every officer on scene. While the police block off the street to prevent more neighbors from joining the crowd, Ms. Hughes finishes loading her meager possessions into a U-Haul.

A line of 15 police move in and are visibly surprised when the crowd shifts to let them through. This action was never about keeping her home, which would have been impossible with all the laws favoring the banks. Ms. Hughes did this to prove a point, and the LAPD, in their attempts to criminalize her legal and constitutionally protected activity, proved it better than she ever could have alone. The crowd gathers on the corners outside the police line. A neighbor speaks up, “Somebody tried to break into my house last month, the police never came, I had to go down to the station to file a report, but they come out in force like this just to kick an elder out of her house? It’s ridiculous.” Another chim in, “The only time we see the police is when they’re attacking us.”

Ms. Hughes, along with millions of others across the country, was yet another victim of the largest scam in world history. Thomas Barrack was one of countless investors whose greed nearly caused the collapse of the world economy. He is now profiting from his crimes by buying properties distressed by the market conditions that he helped create at a fraction of their value (Collin has acquired over 7000 trustee’s deeds just since June 2011). Colony and Deutsche Bank are now gearing up to bundle these rental contracts into securities - creating yet another bubble that will put many more people on the streets when it bursts. Have dozens of officers ever shown up at his home? No.

Malcolm X once said, “In America, Democracy is hypocrisy.” Through her actions, Ms. Hughes proved to her friends and neighbors that this is true. She has still not been able to secure long term housing. When asked what was next for her, she selflessly replied, “Well, there are still a lot of people who need help.”

As she stated in a letter circulated to her community earlier that July day, “Yes, I am tired. I am tired of being victimized, I am tired of being intimidated, I am tired of being afraid, I am tired of allowing more and more vital things to be taken away while keeping quiet, desperately trying to hold on to the meager things I need to survive. I am tired of the police we pay to protect us instead protecting those who exploit and attack us. While I may legally be permitted to fight back, because only if we stand together can we win.”

“Peace to you, if you are willing to fight for it.” - Ramona Hampton
L.A. Organizations Gather to Expand Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign

The day began with a review of last year’s legislation, which included the success of getting Assembly Bill 5 (sponsored by Tom Ammiano) passed out of the Judiciary Committee as well as the ultimate defeat as the bill, which like many other pieces of state legislation, got caught in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. The event also included a panel of speakers featuring Paul Boden from the Western Regional Advocacy Project (which is coordinating the statewide Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign), John Jackson of Hunger Action LA, and Joe Thomas of LA CAN, who was able to speak as someone who is directly impacted by the issues that the campaign is attempting to address.

However, the most important part of the day came when those in attendance broke into small groups to do some planning around next steps and strategies on how to move the campaign forward. The main priorities that came out of these groups were 1.) Holding local direct actions to bring attention to the problem of criminalizing homelessness; 2.) Conducting outreach to get more organizational endorsers; 3.) Improving messaging so that we can effectively communicate our campaign to different audiences; and 4.) Securing support from local and state elected officials.

The group didn’t waste any time getting started on next steps, as the event closed with attendees signing a large letter of support that was delivered to the office of State Assembly Speaker John Perez on October 10, World Homeless Day.

There are many more events planned for the next few months. So if you or your organization would like to endorse the campaign and get involved, please contact Becky, Steve, or Eric at 213.228.0024 or come by the LA CAN office located at 530 S. Main St. For more information on the statewide campaign, visit wraphome.org.

Why do you think it’s important that California create a Homeless Bill of Rights? What are you personally willing to do to contribute to the Homeless Bill of Rights Campaign?

“I think we need a Homeless Bill of Rights because Los Angeles has the largest homeless population and people don’t give a damn. The police are arresting people for being homeless while people are just struggling to get something to eat. We need to help homeless people out.”

“It is important because it would give voice to those without power - to the most disenfranchised. Many of these individuals have themselves made personal sacrifices, like homeless vets who have fought for our freedom. I am personally willing to contribute my time, energy, and voice.”

“The increase of gentrification and the concentration of corporate interests means that homeless residents are increasingly targeted by Business Improvement Districts and law enforcement. The are being forced to vacate ‘valuable real estate.’ We can’t allow that to happen. The HBR would provide crucial protections to those who need it most. The next step will be securing housing as a human right for everyone.”

“Fighting for the rights of the unhoused is absolutely essential because the unhoused are among the most marginalized in our society. Most of us know the priorities in our society are in direct contradiction to human needs. All the money and resources that go to war, policing, and the Prison Industrial Complex need to go to meet people’s needs, like shelter, food, and clothing.”

Interested in writing or contributing to the Community Connection? Have a response to an article or piece you’d like to share? Know of a pressing community issue we should be covering?

Contact us at 213.228.0024 or drop by the LA CAN offices, located at 530 S. Main St.

The Community Connection is a street newspaper and a member of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers. The Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) is a membership organization comprised of low-income, homeless and formerly homeless residents living in Downtown and South Los Angeles, and surrounding communities. LA CAN’s staff and core members write many articles that appear in the Community Connection. These generally appear without a byline, attributed to LA CAN as a collective.

Articles by contributors who are not LA CAN core members and/or personal opinion/experience articles receive a byline. These articles do not necessarily represent the views, opinions and perspectives of the Los Angeles Community Action Network.

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