

The Boston Underground

Issue 59

an independent, alternative, quarterly publication

The *Boston Underground* is a not-for-profit newspaper, collectively run by students and other members of the community. While we agree on certain responsibilities, no one member has power over another. All decisions are made democratically through a process of consensus. We distribute to college campuses and neighborhoods in and around Boston.

CAN I HELP?

If you are an activist, student, author, music reviewer or poet, please send us your content! Submissions should be sent to submissions@bostonunderground.info.
If you are interested in the production of the newspaper, please consider attending one of our upcoming meetings or joining our e-mail list. To learn more about meeting times or to join the list, send an email to join@bostonunderground.info.

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Why We Are Here

A short introduction to the Boston Underground and alternative journalism

In this age of Blackwater mercenaries, spy programs, and oppressions of all kinds, how is one to find out what is really going on? Hidden within this question is another question: how can one tell the authentic, truth-driven journalism from the profit-driven media that sets the agenda and confines the bounds of discussion? These questions are essential ones for those who wish to understand the world around them and, if it is unjust, change it.

Of course, it is impossible to find an unbiased source of information. The amount of happenings in this world does not make it feasible for us to know everything that is happening at all times, and much less to report this raw data in any way that an actual person can understand.

So reporting is all about the act of filtering and prioritizing information.

But rather than a random cross-section of the information available, media that is owned and controlled by corporations tend not only to present information that most appeals to monied interests and corporate-set goals, but also to present a lack of diversity between outlets. Reading newspapers from the mainstream press is reminiscent of standing in an echo chamber and listening to the same voice drone on and on.

Instead of feigning unbiased reporting, we readily admit and unabashedly proclaim that we are an activist news publication. We aim to illuminate perspectives and voices that the vast majority of people would not normally have access to, and to present it in a way that is professional as well as comprehensible.

With this aim in mind, please read on and don't hesitate to send your comments on any articles to feedback@bostonunderground.info. We welcome any compliments, criticisms, and corrections you have to offer.

Who Are We?

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"I'm not buying, no I'm not consuming
The apathetic dribble on the news media's chin"
- RX Bandits, Overcome

Countries with the worst records (in privacy)

Source: Privacy International

Constitutional protection	Statutory protection	Privacy Enforcement	Identity Cards and Biometrics	Data-sharing	Visual surveillance	
UK, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia	South Africa, Japan, India, U.S., Singapore	South Africa, Japan, Brazil, India, Philippines, U.S., Taiwan, Singapore, Russia, China, Malaysia	Belgium, Poland, Spain, Netherlands, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, UK, Philippines, U.S., Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia	Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Austria, Netherlands, Denmark, France, UK, Norway, Russia, China, Malaysia	Hungary, Lithuania, UK, Switzerland, U.S., Singapore, China, Malaysia	
Communication interception	Communication Data Retention	Government Access to Data	Workplace monitoring	Surveillance of Medical, Financial, and Movement	Border and trans-border issues	Leadership
Greece, Hungary, Italy, Czech Republic, Poland, Spain, Cyprus, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Lithuania, UK, New Zealand, India, Philippines, U.S., Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, Russia, China, Malaysia	Slovenia, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Poland, EU, Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden, Denmark, France, UK, South Africa, Russia, China	Slovakia, Sweden, Denmark, France, Israel, India, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Russia, China, Malaysia	Sweden, Lithuania, U.S., Singapore	Spain, Sweden, Denmark, UK, Australia, Israel, Brazil, Norway, U.S., Thailand, Taiwan, Russia, Malaysia	Denmark, France, UK, Iceland, Switzerland, Japan, Australia, Israel, Norway, U.S., Taiwan, Russia, Malaysia	Hungary, Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium, Ireland, Spain, Austria, Netherlands, Sweden, France, UK, Japan, U.S., Taiwan, Singapore, Russia, China

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Climate Justice in Boston Strengthening Our Communities and Building Our Resistance!

By Evan Greer,
Rising Tide Boston

Riding off the energy of the U.S. Social Forum, and drawing inspiration from social movements all around the world, the Climate Justice movement is gaining momentum in the Northeast. With the most credible predictions saying we have less than ten years to radically reduce our CO2 emissions in order to prevent devastating runaway climate change, communities everywhere are resisting the fossil fuels industry, preparing to respond to climate disasters, and standing in solidarity with those who will be most affected by the climate crisis.

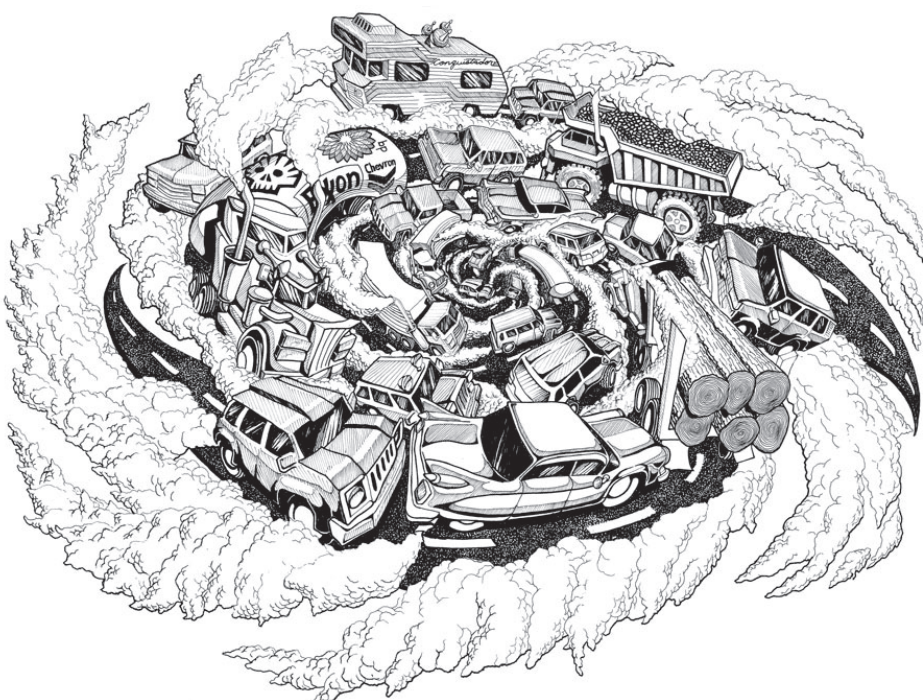
The communities most affected by climate change are the same communities that are already oppressed and marginalized by governments and corporations. Across the world, communities of color, indigenous communities, and the low-income communities where fossil fuels are extracted and burned. Hurricane Katrina was a harrowing warning of one possible future if we allow consumer culture and institutional racism to continue. Rather than passively allowing genocide to take place against these communities, we should be standing in solidarity with them, joining their struggles when asked, and learning from those who have the traditional skills that we will all need to survive the climate crisis.

In Boston, a local chapter of the international Rising Tide Network has recently formed to strengthen the connections between environmental and social justice organizations in the Northeast, and to decrease our dependence on the consumptive patterns, institutions and corporations that are killing the planet. Rising Tide sees climate change not as an isolated environmental issue, but as directly connected to struggles against racism, capitalism, colonialism, gender oppression, and the exploitation of the earth and non-human animals.

Rising Tide Boston has been meeting at the Lucy Parsons Center every first and third Sunday at 6pm to plan for climate justice actions, skillshares, and events in the area. Rising Tide is working with other groups and individuals from all over the Northeast to plan for the 2008 Northeast Climate Confluence, which will be held somewhere in the Northeast at the end of July. This large-scale convergence will coincide with other climate justice gatherings across the U.S. as well as in the UK, Germany, Australia, and elsewhere. The Confluence will be a place for people from a diverse array of social movements to explore how our struggles are connected, share skills and resources, and strategize ways to resist and build realistic, just, and sustainable alternatives to corporate power. The gathering will culminate with a large-scale direct action against the fossil fuels industry and for climate justice around the world. The organizers are working to make the action and the Confluence accessible to all those who wish to participate regardless of language, income, immigration status, physical ability, or age.

Continently, Rising Tide North America is working on three major campaigns in addition to

organizing the regional Confluences in July. The False Solutions campaign, or Greenwash Guerillas, recently drew national media attention for a hoax against the US-CAP, a large group of corporations who claim to be concerned about climate change. That campaign focuses on combating the various corporate-sponsored "solutions" to global warming like carbon trading and offsets, bio-fuels, clean coal, and nuclear energy. Rising Tide is also partnering with other environmental groups in calling for the Fossil Fools Day of action on April 1st 2008, to draw attention to the worst perpetrators of fossil fuels emissions. Finally, Rising Tide is launching a large campaign of education: offering workshops and trainings in high schools, community centers, and universities, all starting conversations about the realities of climate change and provide tools for serious action on the issues. Groups who want to bring a speaker or a workshop from Rising Tide should contact education@risingtidenorthamerica.org.



We are also working with our friends at the Beehive Collective and the Riot-Folk! Collective to develop art and music to spread the word about real solutions to climate change.

Other projects include an ongoing campaign against CitiBank and Bank of America, who are major funders of Mountaintop Removal Mining, an extremely destructive process where mountains are literally leveled by explosives in order to extract the coal inside. Entire ecosystems and communities in Appalachia are facing extinction due to this type of mining, and they need our solidarity. Many Bostonians would be surprised to learn that a significant portion of the energy that Massachusetts uses comes from coal, much of it from coal on stolen indigenous land in Colombia (see Aviva Chomsky's recent article in the Boston Phoenix: "The Dirty Story Behind Local Energy," http://thephoenix.com/article_ektid48183.aspx.) Rising Tide Boston plans to do everything we can to take action locally in support of the communities who pay the highest price for our energy consumption.

There also are many environmental justice struggles right here in Boston that deserve our solidarity. Accordingly, Rising Tide will also be supporting the groups that have been fighting Boston University's proposed Level 4 Bioweapons Lab in Roxbury, as well as the various groups resisting power plants, planting community gardens, and doing solidarity work with political prisoners. We don't seek to overshadow or replace any of the amazing groups that already exist, but rather to help create a forum where groups can better work together and stay connected.

Now is a great time to get involved with organizing for the Confluence and other Rising Tide Boston events. We will be organizing monthly workshops and skillshares leading up to July to strengthen our networks and gain concrete skills around urban sustainability, direct action, anti-oppression, community healthcare, grassroots disaster relief, and more! We recently co-sponsored a benefit show on January 18th, to support

Sadie and Exile, environmental defense activists who were targeted by the FBI during the Greenscare, a nation-wide sweep-up of earth and animal liberation activists that took place in the winter of 2005 and the spring of 2006. On Wednesday, February 6th at 6pm at the Lucy Parsons Center, we are hosting a speaking event for indigenous folks in Canada who are resisting the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, which will further displace indigenous communities and further environmental destruction in that area.

Rising Tide Boston strives to be physically and culturally accessible to everyone who wants to be involved. We are organizing across movements and generations and use consensus to make sure that everyone's ideas are given equal weight. Please contact us if you would like to be involved: rtboston@lists.riseup.net or 978-852-6457.

For more information about Rising Tide and other Climate Action campaigns, check out www.risingtidenorthamerica.org or www.risingtide.org.uk

Related websites:

Indigenous Environmental Network - www.ien.org

The Beehive Collective - www.beehivecollective.org

The Riot-Folk! Collective - www.riotfolk.org

Rainforest Action Network - www.ran.org

Carbon Trade Watch - www.carbontradewatch.org

Safety-Net - www.stopthebiolab.org

Zoning Law Change Limits Number of Students Who Can Share an Apartment

by Jeff Reinhardt

On December 12th the Boston City Council passed a petition to change Boston zoning laws to make it illegal for more than four undergraduate and graduate students to share the same apartment. The law still has to be passed by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and go through the Zoning Committee before it can be implemented. Since January 8th when both organizations reopened after the holidays, this proposal has been one of the foremost tasks for the new year.

Such a drastic measure, which changes the basic right of people to share living space, is certainly going to face legal challenges from both students and real estate companies. Still, there has yet to be much public outcry or support for the measure, which is a necessary element if the zoning law was to be changed eventually. The Zoning Commission, the final step of the process, specifically requires public approval through public hearings.

When news of the measure first arose on December 12th, it was thought by many to be targeted at curbing the loud parties and public nuisances caused by some students who occupy large houses and disturb their neighbors. But, according to City Councilor Michael Ross, who sponsored the bill, the real reason for changing the law would be to curb the "bad economics" caused by the student real estate market.

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“Students themselves are really prey to the real estate market,” said Ross. Everyone knows how expensive it is to live in Boston, and as students look for the cheapest deals, once affordable family-houses are marked up considerably because there are more people living in the space. Many students though, are unable to afford to live with fewer people. This will have to be addressed in the coming months, if the bill is going to pass.

The current law allots 250 square-feet per person to live in an apartment. Thus, a 2500 square-foot apartment, that was once inhabited by a family of four, could be sold as a unit to house ten people.

“A house that was once worth 400,000 dollars, is now being valued at over a million, an unheard of cost,” said Ross. “No family, no professional, no single can compete against that type of economics. It is strip mining the community for any value.”

The law would in effect change the definition of “family” in the Boston zoning code to exclude unrelated university students from that category. “The definition of family hasn’t changed in the hundred years since it was written,” said Ross, who sees the definition as sorely outdated and leading cause of the “bad economics.”

The need for change has been spurred by Boston’s ever expanding student population. With the constant influx of students into Boston and the lack of on-campus housing that is found at many major universities in the city, many students are forced to live in off-campus apartments.

In recent weeks, big universities including Boston College and Boston University have passed budget proposals to bring large amounts of students back onto the campuses and away from family neighborhoods. UMASS Boston, currently a commuter-only school, has also announced plans to incorporate student housing into its campus redevelopment plans.

Mayor Tom Menino has spoken out for universities to move more of their student bodies back onto campuses and supported many of the fiscal decisions made in recent weeks.

Even as these universities bring more students back onto campus, the universities themselves are expanding beyond their previous limits, taking away space and tax-revenue from the city. “The universities in Boston, they’re all improving,” said Ross, noting several accomplishments in academia. But as these improvements come about, and more college students flock to Boston, the issue of student housing is sure to be prevalent in city politics.

CORI Keeps People Locked Up

by Jonathan Barry

On January 12th, Governor Deval Patrick announced a bill and an executive order aimed at reforming the state’s system of criminal records.

Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) is a pillar of racism in Massachusetts. For over two and a half years, a diverse coalition of community groups has been organizing a movement to demand change in the current system of criminal records – a system that members of Governor Deval Patrick’s office have described as “broken”. In particular, this coalition supports the reforms proposed in House Bill #1416 (also known as The Public Safety Act of 2007) to make the changes to reform it.

On September 18, 2007, more than 600 people rallied in front of the Statehouse in favor of the Public Safety Act prior to giving testimony before a judiciary committee about how their lives have been adversely affected by CORI and why change is necessary. The committee

will decide which bills will go in front of the State Legislature for a vote later this year.

CORI is a statewide database of criminal records that lists the number of times an individual has been before a court and the charges against them. Every year in Massachusetts approximately 20,000 people are discharged from correctional facilities with CORIs. Many more people have CORIs that have not even been convicted or incarcerated.

Originally, CORI was designed so that law enforcement officials could gather information efficiently and release it to hospitals, universities and other institutions with a clear need to see the records. In practice, the majority of employers ask job applicants for permission to access their CORIs and will withhold jobs from people who have a CORI. The vast majority of employers do not know how to read a CORI (for example, employers might not be able to differentiate between a conviction and a non-conviction on the record, or between somebody who has several entries on a report because of an appeal process for a single incident and a person who has been tried for multiple crimes). Yet these employers often deny jobs because of the reports, even though the charges may be irrelevant to the jobs being sought. Additionally, CORI often prevents applicants from obtaining subsidized housing or loans, getting insurance, becoming a guardian or foster parent and accessing other societal resources.

These discriminatory practices disproportionately affect people of color because of racial profiling and the high police presence in neighborhoods that are predominantly non-White. As such, the CORI system is a perfect example of how institutional racism works to systematically deny people of color access to resources and participation in the work force. It is also possible to draw connections between the current public housing crisis in New Orleans and the use of CORI to deny public housing in Massachusetts. For more info about New Orleans, please visit peopleshurricane.org.

Not to mention the large corporations that reap huge economic gains from keeping large percentages of the population behind bars. Adding to the enormous corporate profiteering from the prison industrial complex, when people get out of prison, they are far less likely to be able to build a successful life because of CORI and often wind up back in jail. Corporations that build prisons and run them (because prisons are increasingly becoming privatized) actually profit from that bullshit. For example, in 1998, one prison pay phone generated on average \$15,000 a year for MCI. MCI installed these phones for free. Since 1970, the percentage of the general U.S. population behind bars has quadrupled. As the numbers grow, the profits keep going up. And in Massachusetts, where 85% of the citizenry is white, people of color make up over 55% of the state’s prison population. The prison industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the country – profiting off of exploitation and oppression. CORI, as an outgrowth of that industry, is designed to keep people of color contained, both behind prison walls and in our communities.

To take it a step further, sexual violence against inmates—particularly women, transgender folks, and people who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual—is highly prevalent in prisons. Women, transgender people and non-heterosexuals are much more likely to be victims of sexual violence than straight men. As a result, people whose identities are already marginalized by society are beat down (literally and figuratively) even further in a prison environment. Prison rape distorts inmates’ images of their gender and sexuality and limits inmates’ psychological development. It destroys their ability to affirm their identities as people. Ultimately, sexual violence in prisons destroys communities. Prisons destroy communities. CORI destroys

communities.

CORI also affects students. Colleges can deny financial aid and even admission if an individual has a CORI. More research in this area by students is key to a fuller understanding of how CORI can affect student life. The Common Application and individual college applications ask questions about disciplinary history. While colleges do not have the power to check for CORIs, high school policies do have the power to determine how and what information students and guidance counselors must disclose on college applications. Students at Boston College, Brandeis, and Harvard are engaging in city-wide and campus struggles to push our city’s universities to become friendlier to applicants with CORIs friendly.

Somewhat more discouraging though, is data produced in a recent study that white people with CORIs are actually more likely to get called back after a first interview for an entry-level job than a black person without one. The study found that 34 percent of the white test group without criminal records received callbacks while only 14 percent of the black group without records was called back. The white group with CORIs was called back 17 percent of the time, while the black group with records had a 5 percent chance of callbacks.

Aaron Tanaka of the Boston Workers Alliance writes: “Clearly, undoing criminal record discrimination is crucial for reversing the devastatingly low chances of Black returning prisoners—often concentrated in a handful of neighborhoods—to overcome chronic unemployment. But, given that employers prefer White ex-offenders to all Black applicants for entry-level jobs, eliminating the discriminatory mechanism of criminal record checks does not necessarily present a solution to the broader crisis of Black underemployment; ending record checks without addressing racism in business ownership and hiring could simply promote employer preference of white ex-offenders and exacerbate existing disparities between Black and White job seekers.” Fighting CORI, white supremacy, and other systems of oppression must go hand in hand.

But to bring it back to the Public Safety Act – if passed, it would decrease the amount of time needed to close a record or “seal” a CORI from fifteen years to seven years for a felony, and from ten years to three years for a misdemeanor. The new law would also remove non-convictions from an individual’s record and include a non-discrimination clause, which would prevent employers or other institutions from accessing CORIs until they had decided whether or not the applicant was qualified. Institutions would then be required to allow the individual a chance to explain their CORI if one came up. Also, there would be mandatory training for those companies who are authorized to read CORIs. The bill would also make it possible for judges to remove all CORIs from juvenile records upon turning 18 years of age to give them a clean slate upon which to build their adult lives.

The movement for CORI reform in Massachusetts is at a critical juncture because, with the upcoming election year, the likelihood of progressive CORI legislation becomes less and less likely. However, you can play a critical role in the movement for CORI reform. Call Governor Deval Patrick’s office (617-725-4005) and tell him you want him to support the reforms proposed in the Public Safety Act of 2007! Visit bostonworkersalliance.org for more information, or join the city-wide student CORI email list to learn more about student campaigns underway at Boston College, Harvard and Brandeis to make our cities universities more CORI friendly. Taking action and working to reform the system to allow CORI subjects to acquire decent jobs, housing, financial aid and other resources is essential to preventing recidivism and building stronger communities.

Power to the People of Bolivia

by William Budington

Bolivia is a country divided in two. In the West lies vast natural gas resources, the seat of the government at La Paz, and the indigenous majority. In the East, the white minority and business interests exert power from the city of Santa Cruz. Until very recently, Bolivia's white rulers maintained a regime of terror and expropriation of the indigenous, with an illusion of peace being maintained by brutal police forces and repression of union movements.

In 2000, President and one-time dictator Hugo Banzer privatized the water distribution system in Bolivia's third largest city of Cochabamba. This single action left thousands without access to clean drinking water, and as a result the city exploded in a wave of protest and union activity. As news about Cochabamba spread, a broader and more cohesive indigenous social movement began to take form, uniting miners, coccaleros (coca growers), craft workers, and social activists. They started to demand entry into the political arena. In December 2005, Evo Morales became president of the republic, the first indigenous president in the nation's history.

Evo Morales and his Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party ran on a ticket of land reform, rewriting the constitution, and broadening so-

cial programs for the nation's poor. In a recent interview, vice president Alvaro Garcia Linera described the land reform project:

If you look at the program put forth by the poor in Bolivia, it doesn't propose socializing all wealth or property. What you find is the demand for opportunities, a demand to take part in the distribution of resources. I haven't seen anyone who's saying, "We have to take all the land away from the hacendados [large landowners]." They say, "We want to have land too, we also have a right to have land."¹

Asserting the people's right to the land has been a central theme of the Morales government. By September of 2006, Morales had already distributed 2,301 titles of state-owned land, promising to increase that amount to 20 hectares by the end of his term in 2011.² While this may seem like a radical move, it is important to note that this land is not a product of expropriation from the rich, but rather a reallocation of what the Morales government has deemed 'unproductive land.' Still, this plan has been met with fierce opposition from the eastern landowners, who criticize the reform as hinting at communism.

Rewriting the constitution has been a more difficult task for the government to institute. Set in the city of Sucre at the site of an old theater, a new form of political theatrics is taking place. The Constituent Assembly, the body charged with creating the new document, has been bitterly divided between representatives of the rich and those of the poor. Since August 2006, the process has been impeded day after day by deliberation, bureaucratic obstinacy, and even occasional physical violence. In addition, rowdy street mobilizations organized by powerful

right-wing Santa Cruz leaders have disrupted the assembly's work. As a result, not one article has been agreed to by representatives of the assembly.

The right-wing demonstrations have stagnated the assembly so much that on November 24th, an executive order by Morales moved the assembly to the military barracks of Sucre. At the barracks, and in spite of opposition within the MAS party, the "MAS-proposed version of the Constitutional text was approved in full."³

Almost instantly, the colonial city became a "battlefield," where "students and citizen groups went at the police with escalating intensity while the latter responded with tear gas and rubber bullets."⁴ In the ensuing conflict, four demonstrators were left dead. Jumping at the opportunity, the media from Santa Cruz applauded the demonstrators as "democracy's heroes," despite the fact that they were throwing Molotov cocktails through the windows of MAS politician Osvaldo Peredo and vandalizing the city. The conflict has left the two sides more antagonistic than ever, and in the most violent situation in years.

Much of the violence has been prompted by the Santa Cruz-based Civic Committee, an organization formed with one purpose: to destabilize the popular government. Under the catch-all word "autonomy," the civic committee plans to break away from the central government, "and take the natural resources with them."⁵ Although Branco Marincovic is their leader and public face, the militant wing of the organization plays a more sinister role. The Civic Committee youth gangs openly admit to attacking the indigenous minority on the streets of Santa Cruz, though they say it is in self-defense. They wear green arm-bands with imagery reminiscent of fascism.

The third goal of the MAS government - opening up the political arena to indigenous participation - hinges on the success of the other two. Only fifty years ago, indigenous Bolivians had no right to vote. Even today, those without proper documentation, among them the poorest in the country, cannot provide the paperwork necessary to prove that they are "eligible" voters. Still, without the material means of survival, it is difficult to even think of gaining voting rights. And without an overturning of the legal system that keeps these inequities in place, it is impossible to achieve equitable representation.

Although the Morales government seems to have opened up the political arena to the poor and indigenous, in a way the MAS merely rode in on the curtails of a popular movement already in full swing. From this perspective, it is extremely problematic to say that it was the Morales government that provided the framework for grassroots participation in political change. Instead, the reverse seems closer to the truth: It was the grassroots social movements and indigenous workers struggles that enabled Morales' rise to power. It was the initial demands and political power that was exerted through grassroots activism that brought MAS into government in the first place.

Now this real political power is in danger of being destroyed by the redirection of energies into gaining political representation, rather than the furthering of conditions that make grassroots political power possible. As the case in Bolivia demonstrates, real political change is created neither by politicians nor governments, however well-intentioned. Instead, real political change is made possible by the struggles of everyday people.

1 <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/4735>

2 The Economist, September 21st, 2006

3 <http://www.ubnoticias.org/en/article/death-and-sedition-in-bolivia>

4 Ibid.

5 Unreported World: Anarchy in the Andes, 13:40



Bolivian Woman, Sitting

From Chile to Guantanamo: A Survivor of Torture Speaks Out

by Sofia Jarrin

This January marks the sixth anniversary of the first arrival of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, yet Guantanamo is not the first island known for the unlawful abuse and torture of detainees. Island Dawson on the southern tip of Chile is known for its inhospitable, freezing weather, and for many Chileans is also the location of a concentration camp where Pinochet ordered the detention and torture of hundreds of political prisoners.

Sergio Reyes, a Boston resident and activist, was 19 years old when he was abducted from his home in Punta Arenas, faced a mock execution in front of his mother, was regularly beaten, electrocuted, and suffered from simulated drowning. Between 1973 and 1976, he was a political prisoner in a forced labor camp at the now infamous Island Dawson.

On January 10 about 30 ex-prisoners of Island Dawson sued the Chilean government demanding indemnization for all pains suffered during their detention. Their claim for justice reverberates north today, the International Day to Close Guantanamo Bay, as over 26 cities around the world demand the closure of the US detention center.

More than thirty years later after having survived Pinochet's brutal dictatorship, Sergio reflects on Pinochet's death, the economy, torture as a legacy in both Chile and the U.S., and the dismantling of all armies.

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE DURING THOSE THREE YEARS YOU SPENT IN JAIL?

I was three years in the process of prison and torture, which is not that long if you think about what many people have to go through in U.S. prisons. It was three years of extreme repression and you had no choice but to survive and adjust to confinement. However, what made the experience of prison bearable was that it was a collective experience. Pinochet did not succeed in breaking us like they do in the prisons here, where even at the prison level individualism is what counts, survival of the strongest. For us it was a collective experience, and I would dare to say that it was not a bad experience because we learned to really share under the most adverse circumstances.

Our jails were basically transformed into schools. In some places we learned from the best because we had people around us from all backgrounds. I remember I was in the same barrack with a professor of mathematics, a professor of literature, and even if we didn't have books it was just amazing. I learned about the Spanish writers during the Civil War (Machado, Garcia Lorca, and the like), which I had never read. Try to imagine this older guy speaking in complete silence: he was a great lecturer and we were the best students ever. We also had the actual workers (the carpenters, the painters, the plumbers) who would talk about their trade. And even if we didn't have the materials, they would draw and explain and we all learned, because that's all we had.

We definitely suffered but the camaraderie was amazing. We would come from a torture session totally destroyed, physically in pain, psychologically damaged, but as soon as we hit the barracks, where there would be sixty of our companions, that would be the end of it... It was like having this extended family where people would

take care of you. I mean, you came back in very bad shape and people would cure your wounds and cheer you up. We learned to make jokes and laugh about our own problems.

WERE YOU TORTURED ROUTINELY?

The torture sessions varied in intensity, depending on what they were up to. Sometimes it would be very intense; sometimes they would let us be and then come back again. In the beginning it was really continuous for months, at least once or twice a week you were taken for interrogation. But there was a point where... I mean, how much can you extract from somebody if you make them suffer, if you really "squeeze" them as we would say, and nothing is really coming out of it? The other option, you see, is just to kill that person.

DID THE PICTURES FROM ABU GHRAIB AND GUANTANAMO REMIND YOU OF YOUR TIME SPENT IN PRISON?

I know exactly what they're going through. Even those photos that show some of the ways they're transported from one place to the other; you see them blindfolded, held by the arm, tied up. I know exactly how that is. The U.S. model of control through torture is not a new one, you see, it's old. That's exactly what Chileans used, so I know what's going on there.

I do remember once when... I did see in a session somebody observing how they were torturing me, wearing the U.S. marines uniform. That's as far as I would go on testimony about direct participation there. Obviously many in the Chilean military were trained in the School of the Americas...

SO WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ABOUT THE LEGACY OF CREATING A GENERATION OF TORTURERS IN CHILE?

A generation of torturers... I don't think so. I think most people feel horrible when doing this "job," thank goodness. I don't think that is something that people do so naturally; you're under orders, you're getting paid... Although there's always some psychologically disturbed people who do that kind of stuff.

We human beings are capable of unthinkable atrocities, which I think is very scary, but I think also there's a basic element of goodness in people. At least that's what we saw in our prison conditions. Remember that in order to do this, you also have to terrorize the terrorizer. There was a chain of command and the orders came systematically from the top. If I had been someone who was in the army at the time and was ordered to kill but didn't, I would have been killed or made to suffer incredibly. So there's definitely a chain of terror.

IT'S THE MILITARY, THEN, THAT CREATES THE CONDITIONS FOR THINGS LIKE THIS TO HAPPEN...

Dismantling the military killing machine should become the objective of every progressive-minded individual in the world. It doesn't make sense in any grounds to maintain a killing machine, victimize people to the point of being transformed into assassins. That's what we're doing. We're training people to kill, to destroy other human beings. In doing that, we transform the individual into subhuman, never mind what that subhuman becomes capable of doing to others. But the military mind itself is a dangerous mind, is inhuman

to subject anybody to play that role.

We, the smaller countries, should take the higher ground and disarm unilaterally. You see, for the United States is hard to actually destroy its armies because it's an industry, an incredible source of revenue for a class that profits from it. However, for all Latin American countries are actually an expense; we are buyers not sellers of weapons. Latin American countries should say we are not going to buy your weapons anymore, we are going to transform those resources and those men will be incorporated into productive activities, and we're not going to invest those taxes into killing anyone.

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS ON PINOCHET'S DEATH AND WHAT YOU THINK HIS LEGACY IS?

When I was arrested at age 19, Pinochet to me was an old man and was always referred to as "el Viejo", or "el Viejo de Mierda" to be honest, and he made it to 91... I am now in my 50s, and sometimes I wonder if I'll make it to 58. My

mother died at 62 and my younger brother was only 45 when he died. There is no happiness in this process. I don't understand those people who drank champagne and had parties in the streets [after Pinochet died]. We should be sad about our inability to exercise justice, to correct and change things, our inability to understand what happened to us.

Pinochet has died and in an article in the New York Times, Ariel Dorfman questioned whether his legacy is dead (and he actually says that is probably not), but he is talking about the most esoteric legacy, about how he impacted the

social psyche of the Chilean people. But he neglected to say that the politicians who are today in power like Michelle Bachelet are carrying on the economic legacy of Pinochet. The neoliberal structure he imposed is still in place and all the administrations of the "concentración democrática" [center-left Coalition of Parties for Democracy] have simply been very good administrators of this system, including the first socialists.

Ricardo Lagos, for example, had the dubious honor of signing the first bilateral agreement with the United States, a step that most people on the left in Chile would have opposed. Michelle Bachelet will not change a thing [having signed and defended the Free Trade of the Americas].

HOW DOES PINOCHET'S ECONOMIC LEGACY DIFFER FROM WAS IN PLACE PREVIOUS TO 1973?

In 1976 the military dictatorship led by Pinochet, Gustavo Leigh, and all those guys didn't know what to do with the country. There were three years in Chilean history in which power was seized by force and maintained by force, the most brutal one, but there were no governmental policies, no coherent economic policy. Meanwhile the upper class was in a big inner struggle in regards to what capitalist system to follow. There were the landowners, the large factory owners, the traditional oligarchy who prided themselves in having the largest house in the countryside, very conservative, very traditional but in a way not completely useful to U.S. imperialism.

Eventually what happened was that there was this new generation of capitalists (financial capitalists and corporate capitalists) who won the fight, Pinochet sided with them and that's the model we have now. The parties that are currently ruling the country (the socialists and Christian democrats) basically negotiated the transition to non-military rule in 1989, but it was all done behind doors; it did not include the Chilean people in the process.



There's a saying "muerto el perro, se acaba la rabia" [the dog has died, rabies is over]. Not so in this case. Because it wasn't just one dog—with all due respect to dogs—Pinochet was an attack dog for an economic class.

DO YOU THINK THAT THE 2006 STUDENT PROTESTS, THE PENGUINS' REVOLUTION, WAS A NEW KIND OF MOBILIZATION THAT IS SURFACING IN CHILE?

I had to the pleasure to see the struggles of the students in a big fight to try to change the law under Pinochet that privatized education. What the students were asking was to change the constitutional law and to be part of a committee to change it. Once people have tasted power through mobilization, they won't let go.

What you have to understand is that a second aspect of Pinochet's legacy is the political structure of Chile. The constitution written for Pinochet and approved in 1981 still rules the political life of the country. The organic law of political parties took the U.S. model of political party structure. It rules that political parties have to have a certain structure: a president, a secretary, a treasurer. In the past no one could tell the Communist Party that they could have a central committee. I mean, they still can but it is not legal...

HOW WERE YOU INVOLVED WITH THE MOVIMIENTO DE IZQUIERDA REVOLUCIONARIA (MIR)?

The Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria was a movement of young people. The Cuban influence was clear. The social extraction was not from the proletariat. Many of them were intellectuals from middle and upper class with revolutionary ideas who decided to take up arms and create a modern guerrilla like the Tupac Amarus in Uruguay.

When I say that I worked with MIR, I worked with people of the front but it was never my objective to be recruited. I worked equally with the members of the socialist and communist parties. My goal was to completely change Chile, radically. I truly thought we could function better with more justice in a collective manner in a socialist manner.

WHAT WOULD JUSTICE FOR CHILEANS LOOK AFTER PINOCHET?

I would like that the record be set straight. That those who committed these atrocities actually explain exactly why and who ordered them to do it, and that there is a sense of regret for it. And regret is not something that you can force someone to have... Pinochet died with no regrets whatsoever. He thought that what he did was right, so that alone denied us justice.

Let's turn this over... Castro like Pinochet is going to die of old age, and is going to die without having ever faced any kind of trial for his actions that in the revolutionary process ended up with the elimination of many people in the firing squad, execution style.

If he were to tell these people whose fathers, sons, daughters, or mothers were killed, that he regrets that they got killed, that might actually begin to heal some of the pain that those people feel.

I was thinking that many people would feel the exact same thing when Castro dies. People who have felt victimized by the policies of Fidel Castro and the revolution. Castro like Pinochet is going to die of old age, and is going to die without having ever faced any kind of trial for his actions that in the revolutionary process ended up with the elimination of many people in the firing squad, execution style.

If you think about it, in Cuba summary executions were led by a guy that I admire greatly: Ché Guevara. It was called "swift justice" and it was

exercised in a couple of weeks. Some of those people should have faced justice so that their crimes could've been clearly recognized. Actually some of them were probably agents of the Batista's secret service and tortured and killed people themselves. But, do we really know that? Do we know what that individual was guilty of? Did it teach anybody anything besides another lesson in killing?

Sergio Reyes

See also:

<http://www.sreyes.org/>

<http://www.aclu.org/closequantanamo/>

Poetry from the Underground

Hollow Glory
by Mikey Sweeney

*American born, and conservatively raised;
My passion forlorn, my God ever praised.
From the cradle I marched to the brass of the band,
My throat never parched, money always at hand.*

*I rode bikes down my street, played ball with my friends;
Every spring bought new cleats, every fall followed trends.
I soon chased after girls, had love in my sights;
Then to one I gave pearls, and spent endless nights.*

*My plate always full, a roof over my head.
My sheets made of wool, a cross over my bed,
My wife loves me still, my children love me so;
A candle on my sill, a garden by my ho.*

*Then to war we were called, "for freedom and peace."
The evil to be mauled, from this world released.
The army was raised, the troops ready to fight;
The American dream to save, with all of our might.*

*I marched off to war, with a gun in my hand
I ready for my tour, for our nation I stand
"For freedom!" they say, "For justice!" they preach,
"Our fight is today! Let us take this beach!"*

*"For glory!" they scream, as we storm through the sand;
For the American dream, we will destroy this land!
Orders to to fix bayonet, firm onto our gun;
The scene is now set, "kill them! They're on the run!"*

*We chase the enemy down, spilling their blood to the ground.
We burn down the town, in which their forefather's found.
And as I run a man through, he mournfully screams,
He doesn't bleed blue, this is not as it seems.*

*His back arches high, his face twists in pain;
He yells to the sky, to God he calls His name,
"My wife, I love you. My son, be strong."
He has a family too? Oh how he must long.*

*His eyes then went dead, his screams turned to silence.
The guilt in my head muffled all of the violence.
"This man had a wife, a son and loved God."
I ended his life, and for what noble cause?*

*This man I killed was not evil, a monster or a beast,
This man was just a man, a man just like me.*



UNCOVERING THE EASTERN SERVICE WORKERS' ASSOCIATION

by Nate Leskovic

Fall was descending, and as I bundled up and left the Jamaica Plain Harvest Co-op I was greeted with another reminder of the season. "KeySpan made \$43 million last year. Do you know how many people in Boston won't be able to afford heat this winter?"

They told me.

"Are you tired of being burdened by student loans when the companies that provide them make millions?"

Yes!

"Shouldn't everyone have access to health-care and the basic necessities of life?"

Of course!

It seemed I was in solidarity with the people at the table on the sidewalk. I read their flyers and chatted some more—and they made sense. They asked me to sign up, which I thought seemed a bit premature. I told them I'd think about it. Then I mentioned I was a writer and thought they might be a good story.

Silence. They turned their back to me. Strange.

They are the Eastern Service Workers Association (ESWA), described on their flyer as a "free and voluntary unincorporated membership association joining together service workers, seasonal, temporary, and part-time workers and other low-income workers and their families with students, professionals, homemakers, clergy and business owners to fight to improve living and working conditions."

According to ESWA, they do not represent workers in negotiation with their employers, but use an 11-Point Benefit Program to "aid members in obtaining what is rightfully theirs in a context that promotes their best interests on all levels."

During my initial conversation I learned they do not use the Internet, but I decided to check them out online anyways. I wanted to know more, and I sensed something was up. I was immediately inundated by exposes, cult watch lists and a Boston Indymedia thread warning potential recruits to stay away from their "Stalinist" tactics. There was a story here, though perhaps a different one than I initially thought.

For ESWA to have existed in Boston since the 1970s, as they stated, they couldn't be a complete scam, could they? I did not want to blindly trust the Internet. Unfortunately, what I read claimed they were unreceptive to reporters. Instead of risking a bland interview, some rhetoric and the door, I decided I would volunteer and see firsthand what the group does. I could be seen as a potential recruit, not just someone to impress with public relations tactics.

ESWA is a front group for the National Labor Federation (NATLFED). Other ESWA's exist in cities such as Rochester (NY), Trenton (NJ), and Philadelphia. In addition, there are NATLFED "entities" around the country with different names, such as the Eastern Farm Workers Association, California Homemakers Association, Coalition of Concerned Medical Professionals and the Midwest Workers Association. They all basically use the same methods of "strategic organizing," and they all follow instruction from NATLFED headquarters in Brooklyn.

NATLFED began with a man named Gino Perente, whose real name is actually William Doeden. Doeden was a radical, active in San Francisco from the late 1960s through the early 1970s. He organized a group called the Liberation Army of Revolutionary Group Organizations (LARGO) that

actually declared war against the state of California in 1970.

After his revolution failed, Doeden disappeared to avoid child support payments and reappeared in 1972 as Gino Perente. He was now in New York, working for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. His stint with Chavez was brief, but with the knowledge gained he founded the Eastern Farm Workers Association in Suffolk County on Long Island. This initial success organizing workers outside of official labor unions still serves as the historical basis for NATLFED's current activities.

During the 1970s, NATLFED grew and established around 20 entities throughout the country. Under the direction of Perente, it developed a political philosophy based on Marx, Lenin and Stalin and began using a highly structured and centralized power system to ensure control of each entity and its volunteers. The strategy for organizing and recruiting new members is dictated by a copyrighted document compiled in 1973, called "The Essential Organizer." NATLFED's methods never vary from this codified plan. The top leaders of NATLFED in Brooklyn are members of the Provisional Communist Party, which is considered clandestine.

Perente, who died in 1995, was your stereotypical cult leader. Aside from assuming a Latino identity—probably to more easily suggest parallels between him, Chavez and Latin American revolutionaries—he is consistently described as a con-artist, alcoholic, drug addict and sexual predator. He is remembered for delivering rambling speeches late into the night, being constantly surrounded by followers who attended to his needs, as well as abusing his followers mentally, verbally and sometimes physically. In short, he was the stereotypical David Koresh or Jim Jones. In its early history, NATLFED was on a trajectory for revolution and set 1984 for its launch.

Obviously, it never happened. The Brooklyn headquarters was raided by the FBI soon after, followed by some legal problems, but the group survived. They were again raided by the NYPD in 1996, but charges were eventually cleared because of illegal search procedures. It was not a major setback either.

NATLFED is basically harmless in terms of insurrection potential. If discussed at all, the concept of revolution is used mainly to instill a sense of purpose and sincerity among its most hardcore followers. NATLFED is not actively planning rebellion, and would not have the resources to begin.

Since Perente's death, Margaret Ribar has taken control of NATLFED's National Office Central in Brooklyn. The power structure has remained intact, the organizing work continues, but observers say the more militant edge provided by the presence of Perente seems to have subsided. NATLFED appears to exist mainly to continue its existence—with a somewhat successful community service mission that never really expands.

I write about NATLFED with a degree of fogginess because of the extreme secrecy inherent in the organization. There is also a pervasive paranoia that limits sources. Jeff Whitnack, former full-time volunteer and author of a 1984 expose, told me at one point he had an entire NATLFED legal team harassing him.

Members were only willing to discuss community service. As a result, description of NATLFED requires a synthesis of writings, recollections

from past volunteers who often wish to remain anonymous, and some Internet consensus. Most of these sources describe the more shady side of NATLFED operations—but it does do positive work.

Each NATLFED entity sets up what they call a "mutual benefits association" in order to provide services to its members. This is what ESWA does out of their office at 48 Blue Hill Ave. in Roxbury. Benefits distributed include food, dental care, legal advocacy and clothing. They solicit members, local organizations, businesses, lawyers, medical professionals and volunteers to donate services and goods.

I spent three days volunteering with ESWA and took part in some rewarding activity. On my first day, I helped out at a holiday party thrown for its members using donated space in a neighborhood church. I saw families enjoying an enormous meal of donated food, parents grateful to receive donated toys and children dancing to live music and playing with Santa.

During my second day I distributed food. ESWA had secured and sorted items to provide a box or bag for almost 100 families. They had an entire rental truck filled with the goods and I loaded up my car and dropped it off on doorsteps. While I was working, they were able to find a place to stay for a victim of domestic abuse and her child, and got heat turned on for a struggling family.

On my third day I intended to see the advocacy work ESWA was doing for its members, but I soon ended up alone in a room with a full-time volunteer. Surprise! I was being recruited to join ESWA as a full-time, "cadre" member. From my research, I expected this treatment.

ESWA is doing community service work in Boston. Aside from my participation, I spoke with members at the party and they were nothing but grateful. I also spoke with Chris Durkin, Director of Community Relations at Harvest Co-op, and inquired about ESWA recruiting in front of their stores. He sent me even more positive feedback from the community,

recommendations he used to justify Harvest's relationship with ESWA, despite the controversy surrounding it.

However, the service ESWA does is only part of their mission. Some claim it is merely an elaborate NATLFED façade. ESWA and the other NATLFED entities use their benefit program to recruit socially-conscious and charitable young adults into full-time volunteer positions.

Former cadre Whitnack believes by maintaining the pretense of the mutual benefit association, NATLFED entities keep their organization alive, retain high profile members and business partners, and appear like a just another service group.

"They have a ton of doctors and lawyers," says Whitnack. "The bigger fish, they let them have independence. They don't want to lie to them. It's all basically flypaper to suck in new members."

An anonymous, former full-time volunteer who NATLFED convinced to drop out of college about ten years ago — I'll call him Bob—explained his feelings about this tactic: "It's my understanding the number one thing they want is not to help poor or increase donations. The number one thing they want is to recruit more members that will allow them to continue their organization, just to keep it going. New organizers come so terribly slowly that they have to reach thousands to get one to be full-time."

These cadre positions are famous for their 16- to 18-hour work days, demanded seven days a week. The schedule naturally results in loss of contact with family and friends. Recruits are required to quit their jobs and move out of their

homes. Cadre do not receive pay and NATLFED provides them with donated food and shelter.

"These are the pushiest people you will ever volunteer for," warns Bob. "They will take everything that you give them and ask you for more, and if you surrender your independence to them, they will make it very painful for you to reclaim it."

When Bob became cadre, he was given a memo from NATLFED headquarters. "Participation will only be considered on a full-time basis," it said. "That means 24 hours/day, 365 days/yr. You may be as religious as you want, but church attendance is not part of the program for professional revolution-ary. Visits to close friends/family in the hospital may be permitted on request and with supervision."

NATLFED recruitment begins with tabling at strategic locations, such as college campuses or summer festivals, or through door-to-door canvassing in low-income neighborhoods. On my first day I participated in a canvass and saw a few people sign up. The pitch is enticing to anyone facing daily hardship or those with a social conscience:

"Too many of us, for too long, have suffered from low-paying jobs with no benefits...We keep finding that minimum wage is our

maximum wage...ESWA joins together those who realize that as long as any of us are left behind in poverty, none of us are safe...We know that we need an organization with no strings attached to fight to end our second-class status...ESWA is that organization and invites you to sign-up as a member today!"

To join, you are only asked to pay \$0.62 a month! If you can't afford that (!), you don't even have to. The fee is symbolic of the hourly wage earned by the first workers organized by Perente. If you agree to join or volunteer, ESWA asks for your phone number. That is what they really want.

Once they have your number, you will continuously receive calls regarding your participation. "Can you volunteer for this event? When are you coming next? Can we set up a more permanent schedule? We need your help to make a difference!"

ESWA refers to this tactic as "arm's-length systemic organizing," and it made me extremely thankful to have caller ID on my phone. When I asked about the strategy, they explained they could more easily secure commitments from people by phone. I also discovered getting people within "arm's length" ensures opportunity for NATLFED philosophy indoctrination.

During my limited time with ESWA, I was constantly bombarded with discussion-less canned rhetoric. The ideas were obviously part of the "party line," and each cadre used the same lingo and catch phrases. As with the pitch, the orientation and lessons I witnessed were read mostly verbatim from a written text. While talking about potential opponents during one lecture, a full-time volunteer apologized for the language—

blaming it on "70s humor"—but still recited, "You better run motherfucker! We're coming after your mother!"

Another strategy designed specifically to ensnare was the frequent persuading to increase the time you devote to ESWA. Each time I showed up, as well as during each phone call I actually answered, I was always questioned about my participation. Each NATLFED recruit is designated a tabular volunteer or a viable volunteer. This is determined through their analysis of your potential to become full-time, usually done with informal chats and more formal interviews. Most are set aside as unlikely to become a cadre

tedious tasks assigned, but continuous busy-work that numbs the mind. By combining a steady stream of rhetoric with never-ending activity, NATLFED attempts to breed pseudo-revolutionary zealot zombies. There was little conversation within ESWA about anything other than ESWA. If you listen constantly to one philosophy, are provided no opportunity to discuss and constantly face a guilt-trip regarding your devotion, you could soon find yourself on the slippery slope towards entrapment.

When distributing food, I chatted with a member I'll call Joe. He explained that he joined ESWA because he was going through hard times financially and was about to be evicted. Joe hoped ESWA would help and was working hard in return.

"I don't think they understand the word volunteer. No one ever works enough for them. They keep calling and asking for more," he said.

Joe told me he had shown up almost every day for the past few months. Except for some food, he hadn't received much in benefits. "If they don't find Joe a place to stay, I'm gone," he said.

During my volunteer time, neither I nor anyone else was ever allowed to be idle. I was sent to the truck more than once to count the number of food boxes inside, when everyone already knew the number. While working at the holiday party I was constantly asked

what I was doing and barely had an opportunity to chat with the attendees. In the office I was given paperwork to check and when it was done I had to check it again. I witnessed one cadre member moving swiftly around the office for 15 minutes. However, I saw he was only shuffling the same papers from one binder to another, to a different cabinet, back to another binder, into another cabinet...

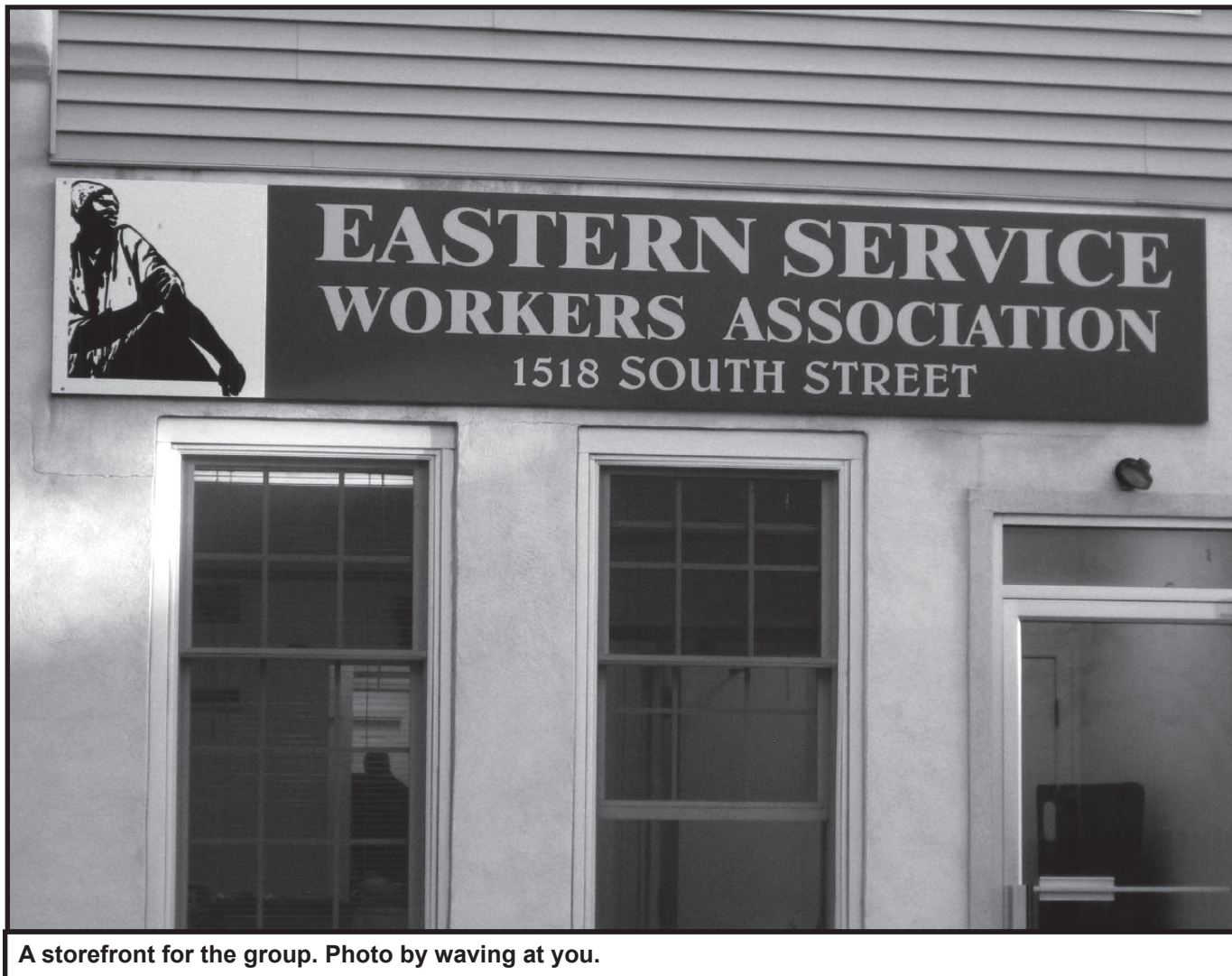
I was further convinced that their tactics were less than honest when I made my final phone call to ESWA. Phyllis Kornblum, organizing director and one of four full-time cadre, appeared quiet, calm and determined during my volunteer work. She, like the others, was warm, kind, and caring in a somewhat unemotional way. I was expecting some degree of anger when I revealed I was no longer interested in volunteering with the group—and that instead I was planning on writing about them—but I was not prepared for the extreme

change in character she displayed. Nor did I think she would still attempt to recruit me.

I explained to her that I had witnessed some of

the community service ESWA does, but that I had spoken with former cadre and done research which led me to believe ESWA—along with NATLFED—was more than just a mutual benefits association. I explained the accusations to her, and I could soon tell she was trained for this situation. Kornblum immediately became hostile and confronted me.

"We're talking about people whose lives are on the line...If you were really interested and were really concerned, you would spend more



A storefront for the group. Photo by waving at you.

member, such as those with families and established careers, but people who have neither—like myself at the time—are targeted.

Once you are singled out, cadre members continuously probe you about your opinions on labor issues, economics and politics. As they delicately weave their ideas into the conversation, they challenge you to defend your participation—or lack thereof—in your previous activism. According to NATLFED cadre, they are the only organization that actually accomplishes anything. They hope you realize you have not been doing enough to make change in this world, and that they have the only effective solution.

"They have the upper hand once they get you in the office," said Bob. "They try to make you believe there is no plan on the planet that can address the problems of poor people like theirs can...I had a difficult time saying no. When someone says to you, 'I have given up my job and an ordinary life to pursue the goal of ending world poverty,' you can't just look at them in the eye and say no like you can to a salesman..."

"By combining a steady stream of rhetoric with neverending activity, NATLFED attempts to breed pseudo-revolutionary zealot zombies"

They are genuine, but manipulative to the point that it's not funny."

Of course, I was only briefly subjected to these tactics. I had also done my research and could easily spot their subtle techniques. But for someone a bit more naive, a little less confident in their worldview and in a transitional period in their life, I can imagine how the path to full-time NATLFED volunteer unfolds.

The other main technique used to recruit is pure hard work. This involves not only completing the

time with us...How many canvasses have you been on? How many advocacy sessions have you done?...If you are interested in helping out, I'd be happy to talk with you...What are you doing to help people?"

I reminded her again that I did spend time volunteering, and I saw the good they were doing for the community, but that I wanted to discuss other aspects of the group. Kornblum ignored my request once again and asked me to spend more time volunteering. It was as if she was reading from a script on dealing with anyone who asks too many questions: play the guilt trip; get them to come back; hope they will eventually succumb.

"I know about all the crap that is said about us," said Kornblum. "It's from people who aren't doing jack shit. If you want to take that shit and you want to buy it, go ahead. If you want to talk to real people who are doing things to help others than you can talk to us."

Along with their recruiting practices, the inherent secrecy and deception of NATLFED raises concern. As my final conversation with Kornblum showed, the cadre of ESWA were unwilling to discuss connections with NATLFED when I asked—let alone any long-term strategies for change beyond the mutual benefits association. They either deflected my questions or gave me some vague, idealistic phrase.

"We're building a voice to stop poverty conditions," they said. "Republicans, Democrats, Independents, and Communists are all members of ESWA. We're a collective, organizing for systemic change. We are creating a force to reckon with."

Why would a group working to improve the lives of the underprivileged withhold their true identity and philosophy from the very people they are organizing to accomplish this? Was this secrecy another form of control?

Former cadre Whitnack sees the leadership as inherently dishonest. "Fidel never lied about his goals," he says. "NATLFED is not trying to hide from the government, but it is hiding from the public and its own members."

NATLFED assumes your everyday tabular volunteer has no need to know about revolutionary ideas. In fact it may only serve to alienate them, thereby losing their contributions to the mutual benefits association. However, once a viable volunteer is brought to the full-time cadre level, revealing the secrets and mythical ties to past revolutionary movements NATLFED has could bolster their loyalty. Being an instrumental part of an underground club, especially one that is going to "change the world," could be very enticing.

"If you never tell people what your real philosophy is until they agree to it," writes one anonymous former full-time volunteer online, "then you will never have to deal with criticism from people who disagree with you."

This secrecy also pertains to finances. NATLFED entities are not charities and are therefore not required to report anything publicly. This means no one can have any definitive knowledge of what is donated or distributed. It also means no one knows how much is siphoned off to the cadre, or to NATLFED headquarters.

ESWA has conspicuously stayed under the radar in Boston. For a group that has been in existence since 1977 and claims to have the only proven, effective method of organizing, it has failed to expand beyond its small benefit program. When asked about membership numbers, ESWA can only give a figure of some 20,000 people who have signed up since its inception. They have no idea how many of these are active members.

I did a survey of various neighborhood groups in Boston, such as the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, La Alianza Hispana, the Urban League, Action for Boston Community Development, the Cape Verdean Com-

munity UNIDO, and others. The organizations had either no knowledge of ESWA or they had heard limited anecdotes regarding its community service work. City Councilor Chuck Turner knew little and former Councilor Felix Arroyo's office did not know the group at all. If ESWA was making an impact in Boston's urban communities, one might suspect they would be better known.

When I asked ESWA what groups they collaborated with, they claimed it was futile to work with or within any existing strategies. Former cadre

Bob described their philosophy: "The system cannot be fixed and the only thing you can do is work with us. If

you think you know differently, you are part of the problem, not part of the solution."

Perhaps NATLFED desires only enough success to keep itself alive and keep its leaders in power. If NATLFED entities were to enjoy significant accomplishments, it would inevitably result in changes to the power dynamic of its structure. Those who succeed would expect to gain more control over operations, which would dilute the power of the established leadership.

Robin Fahlberg, who volunteered full-time for 14 years beginning in 1979, believes this to be the case. "There is some draw into believing that you are a big revolutionary," she says. "As long as the methodology never proves you wrong, as long as you never get past step one, you never fail. Here are people who want other people to look at them as if they were gods. It doesn't matter what they accomplish, as long as they have people following them in admiration."

Success would ultimately bring NATLFED closer to their purported goal of permanent societal change or—gulp—revolution. Some believe the leadership actually engages in deliberate sabotage to prevent disruption of the status quo.

"I was totally dependent on the national organization for instruction," says Fahlberg. "As I became more experienced I began to question them, but experienced a lot of mental and verbal abuse. I had to call in to national every night, and if I didn't do enough or get the right results I would get screamed at.... For one week we would do a canvass campaign. If you kept going on it you could recruit people. Then once it started going, you had to stop and move to a different strategy. There was no continuity in directions."

"There had to be a party with discipline," she says. "So you took orders. Eventually they hope you will stop trying or caring, and just accept what comes down from above. After a period of time in a community you should start to build, and that has never happened with any of the NATLFED entities."

She also described how headquarters would deliberately tell other cadre in her entity conflicting information, essentially pitting one against the other. "At first I thought it was ineffectiveness and bureaucratic problems," she said. "Then I found out that the whole thing was purposeful."

This analysis of NATLFED tactics leads to the cult question. What else can you call a self-perpetuating, yet never advancing organization that controls its members through a highly secretive and structured pattern of power? A quick glance at cult watch lists finds NATLFED right up there with the Moonies and the LaRouchies.

But who's to say one shouldn't get involved with an organization that does actual community service, however small its impact? Why should one be discouraged from participating if they feel they are helping to make the world a better place?

An anonymous post on Boston Indymedia wrote, "For two years I worked my butt off and was isolated from my friends and family—but... certainly no harder than the cadre of other organizations who are passionately serious about their agenda. The articles and exposes fail to mention

that the Catholic Church has cadre, the Democratic and Republican parties have their cadre who sleep in the office...Stockbrokers work unbelievably long hours."

The Boston College PULSE Program for Service Learning decided its students should not work with ESWA. Director Dave McMenamin explained that a few students volunteered during the 2004-05 school year, but discontinued their relationship with ESWA the following year.

"I [initially] imposed a condition," said McMenamin. "If we were going to offer them as a service site, I demanded that [students] would not be pressured for time beyond the time required by our program. I did not want our students canvassing in neighborhoods that weren't theirs either. They wanted to push the students to canvass. They were asked continually to participate more. They experienced pressure."

McMenamin mentioned one of his students, who was a local resident, had the sense ESWA did little to benefit the community. "There was just enough to make me wary," he says. "I didn't feel like I could trust them."

Former full-time volunteer Fahlberg says she is still dealing with the effects of NATLFED. Until recently, she had repressed all memories of her time with the group and it took work with a therapist to move on and speak about it. "When I left, even though I knew intellectually that no one would come after me, I still looked over my shoulder," she says. "The words 'Communist Party Provisional' would put me into a physical panic attack."

Those who oppose NATLFED claim the positives do not outweigh the toll it takes on its volunteers. "Unfortunately it results in burning out people," says Fahlberg. "They get sucked into a black hole and then they don't participate in activism even if they get out."

"I think it's a real tragedy," says Whitnack. "The people that join are some of the best humanity has. When you look at all the people and all the years, it does a great harm to the progressive movement and takes away a lot of potential strength."

"There is a lot to be commended in what they are doing," says Bob. "But it comes at a cost to the personalities of the volunteers. They need to be crushed to keep the continuance and structure of the organization. I really couldn't stand it. I just hated my existence and left."

Chip Berlet, who works for Political Research Associates in Somerville and studies authoritarian movements in the states, also agrees with this analysis: "I continue to feel that the negative aspects [of NATLFED] outweigh the positive aspects. This is a group which continues to misrepresent its history and effectiveness. They never seem to do anything other than parallel the work of existing service organizations, and they have never been able to show seriously that they can provide anything that is different or better. What's the point? People can be a part of existing effective groups. They are a tiny group with almost no impact and a long history of spending a lot of energy in a relatively nonproductive way. The only point is to continue the existence of a group founded by a charlatan."

No doubt, ESWA does assist the underprivileged in Boston. You can see it and they will tell you all about it, but there is much more they won't say.

Author's note: This piece was written more than a year ago, though never published due to various reasons. While ESWA may have changed its ways since, it is highly doubtful when considering the history of the group. I recently witnessed some of its members outside the J.P. Harvest Co-op spewing their same-old shtick.

"I know about all the crap that is said about us," said Kornblum. "It's from people who aren't doing jack shit."

Public Demand Grows for Bush to Release Details of Plan Mexico

By Jennifer Truskowski

Bush is trying to rush Plan Mexico through Congress without making details public, while evidence indicates that the Plan will lead to serious human rights abuses.

The Bush administration is trying to get Congress to approve what it calls the Merida Initiative, a \$1.4 billion aid package to Mexico in order to fight drug cartels. The plan is more commonly known as Plan Mexico because of its inevitable similarities with Plan Colombia, another U.S. aid package started in 2000 to fight drug cartels in Colombia. Even while the administration has refused to release details of the initiative since planning began in March, Congress is being pressured to pass it. The first \$500 million of Plan Mexico is now attached to the appropriations bill for fiscal year 2008.

The Merida Initiative Joint Statement can be found on the State Department website. It reads that Mexico will “strengthen its operational capabilities to more effectively fight drug-traffickers and organized crime.” The U.S. and Mexico will do this with “enhanced transfer of equipment and technical resources, consistent with all appropriate standards in both coun-

tries of transparency and accountability of use.” The aid also includes helicopters, surveillance aircraft, “non-intrusive” inspection equipment, and canine units for the police and military use. The plan will offer “technologies to improve and secure communications systems” to collect information for law enforcement, along with technical advice and training.

The Joint Statement says nothing at all about human rights abuses. This is significant, because various national and international human rights groups have documented hundreds of unpunished abuses committed by the Mexican police and military. These abuses include rapes, illegal arrests, torture, beatings, and murders. The current Mexican president, Felipe Calderón, has been quick to send out military forces to violently crack down on public protests, greatly increasing the number of unpunished abuses. Last year in the state of Oaxaca, federal police were sent to attack protesters who demanded that the governor step down from power. Police beat and tortured people, and people were arbitrarily arrested – including some who didn’t even associate with the protest movement. As a result, at least 18 people were murdered including U.S. journalist Brad Will, who was filming the conflict. To date, nobody has been brought to justice for these killings. Earlier this year in the state of Veracruz, Calderón himself was involved in a suspicious government cover-up of a case where a group of Mexican soldiers gang-raped a 72-year-old indigenous woman, Ernestina Ascencio.

On the State Department website along with the Joint Statement appears a quote from President Bush lavishing praise onto Calderón: “He

has shown great leadership and great strength of character, which gives me good confidence that the plan we’ll develop will be effective.”

PLAN MEXICO VS. PLAN COLOMBIA

Mexican and U.S. lawmakers insist that Plan Mexico is not like Plan Colombia, because Plan Mexico will not include U.S. troops on Mexican soil. However, there do seem to be some similarities between the two plans. The Latin America Working Group (LAWG) is an organization that investigates and denounces human rights abuses and advocates for justice in Latin American countries. It has heavily documented human rights violations and other conditions in Colombia. Like Mexico, Colombia’s military has committed hundreds of unpunished human rights violations, such as extra-judicial executions, disappearances, illegal arrests, and threats against human rights defenders who try to investigate such crimes. In both Colombia and Mexico the majority of these crimes go unpunished largely because military crimes are investigated by the military judicial system instead of the civilian judicial system. As a result, the same military that committed the crimes is responsible for preserving the evidence, clearing the crime scene, and conducting the investigation.

In both Colombia and Mexico, the police and military also have a long history of corruption and ties to paramilitary groups and drug traffickers. In Colombia there are instances where the police and military collaborate with paramilitary death squads. Human Rights Watch documented one brutal massacre in a village in northern Colombia where 300 paramilitaries stabbed, tortured, decapitated, raped, and shot residents. While this was happening the Colombian navy’s First Brigade blocked roads to the village, preventing the International Red Cross from entering. A half-hour after the paramilitaries left, the naval forces finally entered the village.

This case is very similar to what happened in the indigenous community of Acteal in southern Mexico in 1997. Paramilitaries murdered 45 members of a Catholic pacifist organization who were praying in a church. This included 21 women and 15 children. Mexican state Public Security officers stationed nearby didn’t intercept the massacre, which lasted six hours. The perpetrators still have not been brought to justice.

In both Mexico and Colombia these connections between paramilitaries and government law enforcement have resulted in U.S. training and equipment falling into the hands of paramilitary groups. Sanho Tree, director of the Drug Policy Project at the Institute for Policy Studies, told the Drug War Chronicle, “An elite US-trained unit called the Zetas eventually switched sides and became enforcers for the Gulf Cartel. When you hear of machine gun and bazooka battles in Nuevo Laredo, that’s our Frankenstein coming back to haunt us. Now the Bush Administration—never one to learn from history—wants to repeat the calamity.”

Electoral fraud is also widespread in both countries. Journalist and author Garry Leech reports that this year in Colombia, vote buying, government intimidation, and illegal campaign financing were widespread. Similarly, in Mexico, vote buying, threats against voters, and fraud are very rampant according to various Mexican news sources. Mexican journalists, activists, and a large portion of the public also believe that President Calderón’s own election was a fraud. This does not bode well for the two Latin American countries that are friendliest toward U.S. foreign policy.

FORESHADOWING FROM COLOMBIA



It would be prudent to speculate on what the effects of Plan Mexico might be. Since specific details about Plan Mexico are not available, it may be helpful to look at the effects that Plan Colombia has had. The most notable effect may be the fact that Plan Colombia did not reduce the availability of drugs in the United States, which was its intended goal. Eliot Engel (D-New York), the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, said in a hearing about Plan Mexico that when cartels in Colombia shut down, the trafficking business simply moved to Mexico. He stated, "Even if we are successful in Mexico and Central America, experience tells us that this will not end drug production or trafficking. It will merely go elsewhere, and the logical place seems to be the Caribbean."

Another remarkable result of Plan Colombia was that human rights abuses have actually gotten worse since it was implemented in 2000. Human rights conditions were written into the plan, but Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported that such conditions

were not met. Congress still approved further appropriations to Colombia even after hearing such reports. According to a recent report from LAWG, extra-judicial executions have increased by 66 percent in the past five years compared to the period between 1997 and 2002. The military still handles the majority of these cases. Of the 955 cases that have been reported since 2002, only two have reached a sentencing phase. Lisa Haugaard, executive director of LAWG, stated that the human rights conditions in Plan Colombia have been "impactful," but admitted they were not "successful."

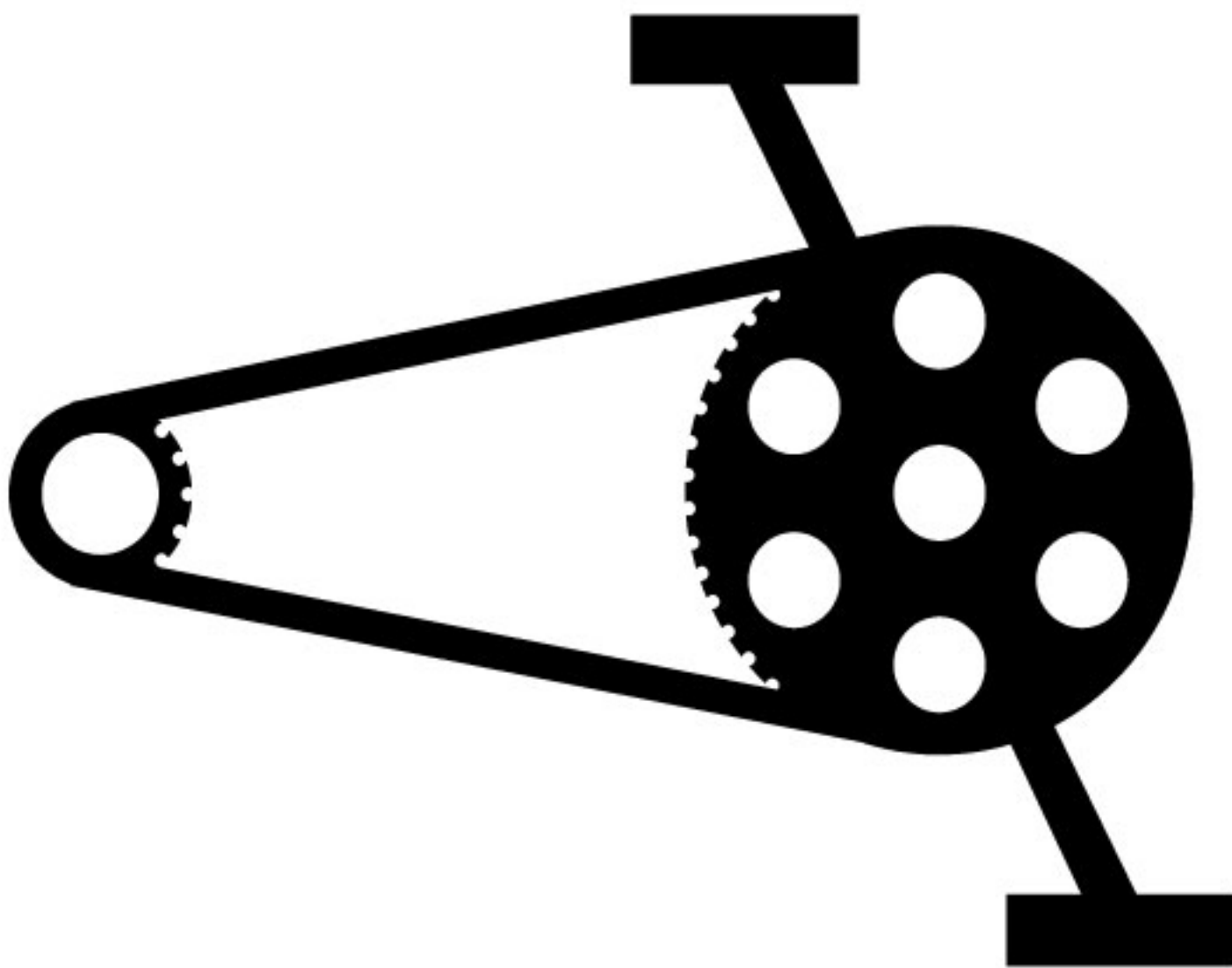
Mexican human rights leaders are especially concerned with Plan Mexico. The majority of crimes committed by both the Colombian and Mexican governments target people involved in social movements. In Colombia the majority of the victims of extra-judicial executions were poor farmers, indigenous people, or community leaders. Similarly in Mexico, indigenous people and activists are usually the targets of government violence. According to author Garry Leech and Human Rights Watch, business leaders and the Colombian government have tried to

link peaceful NGO's and activists groups to leftist guerrillas. This further endangers their lives. In fact, this year in a public speech Colombian President Álvaro Uribe accused those who denounce extra-judicial executions of serving guerrilla groups.

Mexico seems to be following this trend, as increasingly the Mexican government is criminalizing public protest by sending police and the army to violently disrupt peaceful demonstrations. For example, the current movement to overthrow the governor of Oaxaca was galvanized when 700 police attacked a peaceful encampment of teachers striking for better wages.

In both Colombia and Mexico, wealth is increasingly becoming concentrated in the hands of the few, and disparity is deepening as wages decline. This is largely due to US-supported free trade policies that provide subsidies for large corporations while cutting subsidies for small farmers and businesses. Growing numbers of people in both countries are being displaced and living without electricity and potable water. Protesting is a democratic means for

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these peoples' voices to be heard. Increasingly it seems to be endangering their lives.

Additionally, since transnational corporations are taking over the market for legal food crops, many poor farmers in both countries who can't compete turn to cultivating drugs in order to survive. Such poverty has also pushed some people to join guerrilla or paramilitary groups as an alternative means to gain power and money. Many critics believe money would be better spent to support fair labor practices, fair trade policies, and better wages.

WHY PLAN MEXICO?

A logical question would be, "If Plan Mexico is not expected to reduce drug availability in the United States, why is the administration pushing it?" Counterpunch journalist John Ross speculates that one reason may be the lucrative weapons contracts it would offer. He documents how private military contractor Blackwater is aggressively pushing for a new military camp in the San Diego area close to the Mexican border. He believes Blackwater's efforts are suspiciously timed in the wake of its scandal in Iraq and the anticipated passage of Plan Mexico. Indeed, before Plan Colombia was passed, major defense contractors who lobbied heavily for the plan later benefited with millions in military contracts.

Another benefit Plan Mexico might have is the security it would offer to corporations that are trying to capitalize on Mexico's resources against the will of indigenous populations and other activists. In Colombia, the giant U.S. oil conglomerate Occidental Petroleum benefited richly from Plan Colombia weapons and security guarding its oil pipelines while it was drilling on indigenous land against the will of the indigenous U'wa people. In fact, many of the human rights violations that happen in Colombia are linked to international corporations. Recently Chiquita admitted to paying off paramilitary and guerrilla groups in Colombia, and Coca-Cola, Occidental, and Drummond Coal have all allegedly hired armed mercenaries to assassinate union leaders and other organizers at their Colombia locations.

Currently in Mexico, foreign companies are buying cheap land and water rights to build dams, wind farms, and run factories in resource-rich Oaxaca and Chiapas. These are the two states in Mexico with the strongest resistance among indigenous and social movements opposed to such projects. US-subsidized military force would be useful to assure security for such foreign corporations.

These telling facts lead many to believe that Plan Mexico is not about drugs at all, but about maintaining power and profits for multi-national corporations and weapons contractors. If details were to be made public, the true intentions of this Plan could be made clearer. Meanwhile, opposition groups are mobilizing and suggesting alternatives.

OPPOSITION IS RUMBLING

Leading human rights organizations have issued press releases criticizing Plan Mexico. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) all highlight concern for the Mexican government's unpunished abuses, and warn that unconditional aid to law enforcement could lead to further abuses. They all demand that human rights conditions be included in the aid package.

WOLA's report on drugs and violence in Mexico focuses heavily on Calderón's deployment of military forces to help the police deal with civilian threats in various Mexican states. WOLA points out that the military is trained for combat

and not for dealing with civilian problems. This has led to bloodshed as soldiers have killed innocent civilians and have committed rape, illegal searches, and torture during counter-drug operations. As a result, WOLA demands that Plan Mexico focus on civilian law enforcement instead of the military.

Other grassroots groups have come out with even stronger statements. Friends of Brad Will (FoBW) is a group of friends, family, and activists who support justice for the U.S. journalist murdered in Oaxaca. They have been especially active with organizing protests and encouraging people to call their elected officials to simply say "no" to Plan Mexico. FoBW believes that simply demanding human rights conditions and focusing on civilian law enforcement is not enough. They point out that one of Brad Will's alleged killers is a Mexican police chief, highlighting the fact that Mexican civilian law enforcement is just as brutal and notoriously corrupt as the military. They fear that as long as the aid is heavily focused on law enforcement equipment and training, any stipulations about human rights conditions will be just as ineffective as they were in Plan Colombia.

Additionally, they assert that training should not focus on expensive equipment and lethal weaponry, but on human rights education and reform. Robert Jereski, Congressional Representative of FoBW, stated that he can't believe that \$1.4 billion could possibly be spent on the sort of ethical reforms the organization would like to see in the law enforcement system. He said, "Why not just have a \$10 million multi-year education effort?"

The Drug Policy Alliance, an organization that promotes new drug policies and seeks alternatives to the war on drugs, agrees. In a press release, it urged Congress to vote down Plan Mexico and instead fund a comprehensive drug treatment program in the U.S. in order to "hit the drug cartels where it really hurts...[by] reducing their customer base." A 1994 RAND Corporation study found that treatment for heavy cocaine users is far more effective at reducing consumption than interdiction and programs that attack cartels in other countries. Global Exchange, an organization that promotes human rights, local sustainable economies, and fair trade, is also supporting the effort to vote down Plan Mexico.

In a surprising twist in November the United Steelworkers (USW) issued a bold statement against Plan Mexico. The USW is the largest industrial union in North America. They say that Plan Mexico will undermine human and labor rights in Mexico. In a letter to U.S. government officials, USW International President Leo W. Gerard explains how the Mexican government has been systematically undermining international labor rights and repressing unions. These abuses include "deploying military and security forces against the union, resulting in the deaths of three union members," refusing to punish company officials responsible for the deaths of 65 miners in a tragic mining accident, and "filing baseless criminal charges" against the General Secretary of the National Union.

He also demands that instead of passing Plan Mexico, lawmakers should "research methods for using the money to encourage economic development based on respect for human and labor rights in Mexico." Otherwise the repression that Plan Mexico will invite "will likely lead even more Mexicans to conclude that their only future lies in migration to the U.S."

Lastly, the Latin America Working Group (LAWG) has similar human rights concerns, but it has yet to release an official position on Plan Mexico. LAWG has advocated against the destructive Plan Colombia for years. In an interview, LAWG's executive director Lisa Haugaard said that a public statement would be

released in the coming weeks. When asked if she thought LAWG would strongly oppose Plan Mexico, she said it wasn't that simple. She shed light on the more diplomatic stances of Amnesty International, HRW and WOLA, explaining that there are some positive aspects of the plan, such as aid for drug interdiction and to improve the justice sector, and that's why some human rights groups are reluctant to reject the whole plan. She said that they would like to put the whole plan in perspective, but expressed frustration that this is difficult to do when the administration won't release the details.

WHERE'S THE BEEF?

Haugaard isn't the only one frustrated about the lack of details. In a House Committee hearing regarding Plan Mexico last week, both Democratic and Republican members of Congress lashed out at the administration for excluding them from the plan's development. Tom Lantos (D-California), Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said, "As a matter of fact, we first learned of the initiative from the media.... This cavalier disregard of congressional concern is deeply disturbing." He also criticized the plan as "naïve" for assuming that the "legendary corruption" of the Mexican police force will "somehow diminish or disappear as a result of this proposal."

Members of FoBW also attended the hearing and regularly disrupted proceedings to bring attention to Mexico's human rights abuses. During the hearing Thomas Shannon, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, tried to blame drug cartels for the murder of Brad Will. One of the FoBW activists interrupted him in order to point out that the suspects of Brad Will's murder are actually Mexican government policemen and officials.

As pressure mounts from an impressive variety of organizations, congressmen, and individuals, the administration maintains its silence about the details of Plan Mexico. Some critics suspect that this is a strategy to avoid any serious scrutiny and criticism as Bush hastens Congress to pass the first \$500 million installation of aid. In fact, during the hearing Mr. Shannon spoke as if Congressional approval were an extremely urgent matter: "Our allies in this region have already begun to act and have called on us to assist them as quickly as possible." However, Chairman Lantos pointed out to Shannon, "In nine months of negotiations you didn't have time to come and consult us?"

Although there is a wide range of perspectives among Plan Mexico's critics, they seem to agree that the Plan should not be approved before details are made available and before all concerned parties have had time to study them. If the Plan is included in the upcoming appropriations bill, it is unlikely that this goal will be met. It's not unreasonable to expect details to be made public before the first \$500 million in tax dollars are approved for the \$1.4 billion plan. It's only fair that no aid is approved at all until human rights organizations, Congress, and the public can closely scrutinize every single aspect of this plan.

After all, critics argue that if Bush is sure that Calderón has all the best intentions and the plan will indeed be a "new paradigm for security cooperation," as the State Department says, then he should have no problem finally exposing it to the public.

Because this article was originally published on November 19, 2007 on the Chicago Indymedia website, the editors of this newspaper contacted the author, Jennifer Truskowski, to get an update about what has happened related to Plan Mexico in the last two months. The following is her update, written on January 21st.

Due to the pressure from citizens and human

rights organizations, and the doubts that many members of Congress have expressed, Plan Mexico still hasn't been brought to a final vote. According to various news sources, it will probably be voted on sometime in early 2008. Plan Mexico has also been brought to the attention of the U.S. presidential candidates. Republicans Rudolph Guiliani and Mitt Romney both support the plan unquestioningly. Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have expressed their concerns over human rights violations in Mexico, but both have failed to mention in their public statements that the Mexican government itself is guilty of committing a large number of such violations.

Still, Plan Mexico has suffered various blows. The independent website Narco News has revealed a Mexican drug scandal involving the U.S. government, indicating that corruption also runs deep into U.S. government circles. And the United Steelworkers are demanding public hearings about the Plan, after the Mexican government recently sent federal and state police to attack striking miners in Sonora, Mexico.

Since this article was written, LAWG also released its statement on Plan Mexico, expressing the same concerns as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. While these groups support the part of the package that would provide funds "to strengthen justice institutions in Mexico," it's fair to question how these funds are supposed to be spent and monitored in such a notoriously corrupt system. This information is hard to scrutinize since the Bush administration still hasn't released full details of the Plan. It is highly recommended that concerned citizens write letters-to-the-editor to the major media outlets, who to date have incompetently covered this issue, and to continue to pressure their members of Congress and the presidential candidates.

The following, from the original November article, is a list of recommended actions for those concerned about Plan Mexico.

Contact the following officials and tell them:

1. Plan Mexico should be separate from the 2008 appropriations bill.
2. They should demand competent investigations into the murders and abuses committed by Mexican law enforcement, including the murder of Brad Will.
3. They should refuse to take any action on Plan Mexico until all details are made public and fully scrutinized.

Tom Lantos, Chair, Committee on Foreign Affairs
650-342-0300
415-566-5257

Eliot Engel, Chair, House Subcommittee on Western Hemispheric Affairs
202-225-2464
914-699-4100

Nita Lowey, Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations
202-225-6506
914-428-1707

Nancy Pelosi, House Majority Leader
202-225-0100

Hillary Clinton, Senator and Presidential Candidate
clinton.senate.gov/contact/

Your own congresspeople: www.house.gov,
www.senate.gov

For more information on what you can do to help: friendsofbradwill.org

A Call to Porn

by Masha

The discussion of whether or not porn can be feminist has become a scholarly debate, and I'd really rather not go there. I'm writing this article presupposing that the women involved are there because the satisfaction they receive keeps them coming back to it. I'd also like to preface this article by stating that this is the view point of a woman who is sexually open-minded, so although I like to think that I have a good understanding of different gender identities and sexual preferences I apologize in advance if some readers see a bias. And regardless of everything that I discuss, it must be said that I really, really love porn – however, some kinds more than others.

I am confident that just as long as there has been pornography there has been some sort of alternative to the "pop-porn". But in recent years the ease with which one can admire tattooed and pierced bodies without any mod left to the imagination has ended the hunt for the search of porn that satisfies that kink. Punks, hipsters, goths, emo kids, ravers, rockabillys, the list goes on. These people are getting naked and suggestive for cameras in alleys, in dorm rooms, in the bathrooms of bars, by themselves, with their friends, for professional photographers, for their own digital cameras, for money or just personal satisfaction – and its all ending up online and people are demanding more. This sort of porn for and by everyone who wants in is redefining what pornography is. No longer is it all fake, plastic, contrived and, honestly, kind of unattractive. Instead it looks like real people, with their real styles in their real spaces looking naked like a real person would and having sex like real people do. At least that's the intent, right? To show that people with alternative looks and lifestyles are just as beautiful and sexy as any mainstream nude model or porn star.

I intend to criticize the validity of this claim and a few others. Is alt-porn sticking to its promise of supplementing the porn world by consistently offering diverse interpretations of beauty and contemporary sexuality? Also, I think an interesting point to consider is the implication on the people that identify in one way or another with the participants. Do they feel empowered by the varieties of looks represented – or is there even a variety at all? Does the publication of sex of this type help them to feel more comfortable with their sexuality if they have an unconventional gender identity, sexual preference or body image? Are people increasingly encouraged to express sexuality that they would generally be restraining from in their daily lives due to the suggested cohesion between alternative sexuality and indie culture?

Not all alt-porn sites are the same – some are definitely much more committed to breaking stereotypes and positively representing different looks and conceptions of sex. In my research it was rare to find a website that had diverse models, hetero- and girl on girl sex. Therefore, with the rare exception, the target audience is still straight males or more broadly, those attracted to women. To me, this seems like a blatant inconsistency with the aims of the people who run the site. Generally, most of the sites that claim to do something "different" than what's already out there are really just featuring the same kind of mainstream models, except that now they have tattoos and piercings

and listen to obscure music. In their attempt to create porn that empowers women that are unconventionally beautiful, they are pushing it into the realm of sexual objectification. By limiting it only to female models and catering only to people attracted to women, they are still placing women in the role of satisfier of sexual desires, that kind of objectification still exists even if the model has a gnarly chest piece. As for body image, that generally ranges from curves in all the right places to really skinny, and always perfectly, ahem, groomed or hairless. So exactly what kind of popularly accepted standards of beauty is this breaking? I guess the really skinny girls sometimes look androgynous – I'll give them that, but I think that I'm being kind. I mean not even a hairy armpit (!) I don't know if that is a result of pressure from the website or a decision by the individual, but its only fair to assume that its some sort of rule. My fellow porn lovers, body hair is natural and to expect that a model painstakingly grooms to pre-pubescent smoothness is a lesser version of expecting a nude model to have boobs that point up regardless of the means of achieving that – its still fake. Another scruple most people have with mainstream porn is the look of the people. They look absolutely artificial, like their skin was never exposed to the elements (except for that perfect bronzed glow), they've never been a victim of a childhood accident, they all just happen to be blessed with double-Ds and a 25 inch waist and their bodies are impervious to gravity and time. But alternative pornographers do claim that they never use any airbrushing or other techniques to serve the purpose of "perfecting" the bodies of the models. The occasional razor burn and stretch mark attests to that – so that's good, at least the people look like they're made of skin they've lived in.

Suicide Girls is pretty much a household name, Joanna Angel (creator of BurningAngels) is winning AVN awards and Vivid Video (an extremely popular mainstream porn production company that has brought you the classics All For Cum and Cum For All, Soccer Moms who Suck, Hey Mom, I'm not a Virgin Anymore and many more!) now has a branch called VividAlt. The debate over whether or not this is a good thing is tiresome and can be filed under stereotypical hipster favorite – the sell out conversation. But what can be said for sure is that these people are becoming a part of the "industry" and with that comes rules, restrictions, censors and (dramatic pause) cash flow. If you're reading this paper you

"Are they implying that there is something to be ashamed of, or that their members are people who keep their sexuality secret? Um, I kinda think they are."

probably know what that means so don't let me insult your intelligence by expounding on the evils of corporate money making. So even being a part of the porn industry is being subject to certain pressures. Bottom line, contracts are not empowering.

If you look at many of the porn sites I list at the end an interesting characteristic that they share is that they all contain various facets of their target subculture(s). They have music, movie and book reviews, party pictures, links to fashion and lifestyle blogs (many of which also include a nudey pic here and there), politics and even support their favorite charities with some of their profits. When I first did a side by side comparison of an alt site and a mainstream one, this was most startling. It really appears as though mainstream porn is all about keeping one's interests discreet and oneself anonymous. Are they implying that there is something to be ashamed of, or that their members are people who keep their sexuality secret? Um, I kinda think they are. Mainstream sites are just sex and money, literally. Alternative sites show that there is something behind the sex, some motivation or reaction or just the fact that the people involved are real and come with things to say (no puns, I'll forgive you for having your

mind in the gutter). Also they create online communities by having the models keep blogs and members can have profile pages. This part of alternaporn I really enjoy, it is truly an effort at breaking stereotypes. These people can show that they are not just interested in sex and exhibitionism and are totally void otherwise. The people are given an opportunity to describe their experiences as erotic models and express how they feel about their lifestyles and identities. I think that this creates a positive destigmatization of sexuality; I mean sex is everywhere, and people are constantly thinking about it and doing things to get more of it. This just helps us finally admit that to ourselves and be OK with expressing the different ways in which we understand what sexuality is.

Many alternative pornographers insist that their work is art, not just an appeal to instinctual sexual arousal. This is a hard thing to critique because the definition of art is so subjective and broad. While this can be argued for soft-core stills with flattering lighting and unique angles; it is hard to be convincing that the work in question is more than raunchy porn when it is a photograph of a gaping orifice with a penetrating phallic object. There's nothing wrong with porn being porn and its pretentious when people try to label it as some piece of high art. So really, if you're signed up to be on either side of the camera let me lay it out for you... porn is porn. Its first going to be porn, and then you can go convincing yourself and others that its erotica or art.

Living in Boston I consider myself lucky to be the birthplace of Boink magazine. That thing is great. Its got interesting articles, pictures that ranges from creative to sexy to shocking, diverse models, and hilarious advertisements (I'm thinking about the back cover of the first issue). What I like most about this magazine is that it seems like the models are doing this to have a liberating experience, not as a spring board into the porn world – that gives it a real, DIY dimension that the websites in my research

were lacking. And also, one of my closest friends has a very sexy, very suggestive, very naked spread in this mag. It's really fucking hot, mostly because she and the male model she is partnered with are both very hot people. I figured I would ask her some questions about her experience to add a first hand account to my critique. What follows is the paraphrase of our conversation...

I began by asking her why she did it at all. "This sounds kind of silly but I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it. That I could pose for a porn magazine and take everything that comes with that." "What do you mean by everything that comes with it?", I asked. "Well it hasn't been the best experience I've ever had, I mean it comes with some down sides – all of which I was expecting. I definitely felt some of the judgment and objectification felt by women in the industry. I think that by the virtue that I am a woman and women are always kind of the focus in porn, it made my experience after the publication different than my partners." This led me to my next question: During the actual shoot do you think you had a different experience than you partner? "Well, we had just met earlier that day for breakfast, so it is kind of uncomfortable suggesting sex with a stranger of the opposite sex. I initially wanted to do the shoot with another woman. But once I thought about it and committed to posing with a man, I knew I had to do it and like I said, I wanted to prove to myself that I could. At the shoot itself, I don't think our experience was that different because we were in the same starting point. Except the fact that he was gay, so obviously that made it a different experience for him to be with a woman in that kind of situation, but I think that's the only exception." "I'm sorry I'm laughing but that's kind of funny... anyway, how did you choose Boink?" "Well honestly, the opportunity presented itself and I just did it. It was the easiest place for me to pose in and I wasn't going to go out of my way to do it. I'm not trying to be a porn star or erotic model. Also, I think

the editors are really doing something right, they're filling a really unique niche that there is a demand for. Its really varied and I appreciate that about it, its not just conventionally beautiful people." "So I know you love porn, what's your favorite?" "I really like alternative porn because its more attractive. The people look real and its not just plastic balloon boobs bouncing around." "Do you think that porn is art?" "It is what it is, and its porn. Calling something art is a difficult thing to do, I mean I know of an artist in the 80s whose whole thing was to take erotic pictures and asked the viewers to decide if its art or porn. I know that I was in a porn magazine and that's that. I think its porn because its suggestive of sex."

So like I said, I love porn. I prefer alternative porn that I most ideologically agree with, but if I can't afford that, I would be lying if I said that I avoid mainstream porn. I guess I wrote this article because I wanted to call some people out. If you're a business person being a pornographer to make money, that's fine but don't preach and don't try to operate based on some sort of principles. Alternative porn really needs to be something different – a reaction to what is established. Just featuring girls with body mods does not make it an alternative site, it makes it a fetish site. So people who like to be naked in front of other people, get out there and photograph it because we want it, especially if you've got something going on that hasn't been seen yet.

(I'm taking a break from the word "alternative" for a while; I think I've now surpassed my quota. Damn, this took me a long time to write. I guess the research was really, uh... gripping. I need a smoke.)

References:

Boink, Burning Angel, EroticBPM, Supercult, Deviant Nation, RazorDolls, Perverse Fixation, NoFauxxx, IThinkThatsHot, Fleshbot, IndiNudes, Veg Porn, FatalBeauty, Suicide Girls, Gods Girls.



The Boston Underground Calendar

Organization Meetings:

Every Monday:

Open Mic Night at TJ Scallywaggle's Vegan House of Pizza and Subs, 7pm, 487 Cambridge St, Allston, more info: www.myspace.com/scallywagglesopenmic

Papercut Zine Library meeting, 7:30. 45 Mt. Auburn St, Cambridge

The Greater Boston Stop the Wars Coalition meets every Monday evening at 6:30pm in Encuentro 5 (33 Harrison Ave., fifth floor).

First Tuesday of Every Month:

BAAM meeting, 7pm, Lucy Parsons Center, 549 Columbus Ave

Second Tuesday of Every Month:

Anarchist Black Cross meeting (defense and prison abolition group), 8pm, 45 Mt. Auburn St, Cambridge

Every Wednesday:

Radical film screening, 7pm, at the Lucy Parsons' Center, 549 Columbus Ave, Boston.

Every Friday:

Food Not Bombs free community meal, 3-5pm, Boston Common near the Park St T stop.

The Boston RAT (Radical Arts Troupe) meeting to plan for weekly Saturday performances, 7pm, email talktrash@riseup.net for location as it changes.

Second Sunday of Every Month:

Industrial Workers of the World meeting, 2pm, Lucy Parsons Center, 549 Columbus Ave.

Every First and Third Sunday:

Rising Tide Boston meeting to plan for climate justice actions, skillshares, and events, 6pm, Lucy Parsons Center, 549 Columbus Ave.

Every Second and Fourth Sunday:

The Boston Animal Defense League meets up to plan the future of animal liberation activism in Boston. 7pm, Lucy Parsons Center, 549 Columbus Ave.

Tuesday, March 11th:

Next Meeting of the Sacco and Vanzetti Commemoration Society; 6:00 pm. Democracy House, 45 Mt. Auburn Street, Cambridge.

Upcoming Events:

March 12th:

"Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Dissent", a talk by Carol Rose, Executive Director of the ACLU of Massachusetts, and author Jonathan Vogels, accompanied by a screening of Freedom Files II -- Surveillance. 6:30 pm at the Old South Meeting House, sponsored by the ACLU of Massachusetts.

March 14th:

Film screening of *Brad, One More Night at the Barricades*. Brazilian filmmaker and media activist, Miguel, will be on hand to discuss his documentary tribute to a fallen friend, Brad Will. 7pm, Lucy Parsons Center, 549 Columbus Ave

March 15th:

Allston/Brighton Community Day, starting at noon at the International Community Church (30 Gordon St., Allston). Join the Allston/Brighton Neighborhood Assembly for a day of family-friendly activities, entertainment, community-building and education. Louder local bands start performing at 5 pm.

Boston General Membership Branch of the International Workers of the World's organizer training course, 9am-5pm, Encuentro Cinco, 33 Harrison Ave, more info and materials: www.wbumpus.com

March 19th:

Antiwar rally at the Park St. T stop on the Common, 4:30-6 pm.

March 22nd & 23rd:

Northeast Anarchist Network General Assembly in Ithaca, NY, more info: www.neanarchist.net

March 27th:

"Acknowledging the Past, Imagining the Future -- Palestinians and Israelis on 1948 and the Right of Return", a speaking tour featuring Palestinian activist Mohammad Jaradat, and Jewish Israeli educator Eitan Bronstein. 7-9 pm at the Cambridge Friends Meeting House (5 Longfellow Park, off Brattle St.)

April 1st:

Fossil Fools' Day, collective action led by the Energy Action Coalition, Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, and Rising Tide Boston, to turn the tide away from fossil fuel dependence and towards a clean and just energy revolution. www.fossilfoolsday.org

April 11th:

The Mountaintop Removal Road Show, 3.30p-5p, Worcester Public Library, Worcester, MA <http://www.mountainroadshow.com/>

The Mountaintop Removal Road Show includes a stunning 22-minute slide show about the impacts of mountaintop removal on coalfield residents, communities and the environment, and features traditional Appalachian mountain music and shocking aerial photos of decapitated Appalachian mountains.

April 11th - 14th:

Boston Area - Massachusetts Power Shift (MAPS) Thousands of citizens from across Massachusetts and beyond are coming to Boston to demand action from their elected representatives and learn effective tools and strategies to utilize in their communities. Check out www.masspowershift.org for more info.

April 12th & 13th:

The New York City Anarchist Bookfair, 11am- 8pm, Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Square South, Manhattan, more info: info@anarchistbookfair.net

April 26th:

Boston IWW fundraiser, bands, food, speakers, and fun, 6pm, Encuentro Cinco, 33 Harrison Ave.

May 1st:

May Day in Boston! Stay tuned for a full events schedule or go to www.bostonmayday.org!

May 10th:

Power to the Pedals, around Boston
A charity bike ride to support the climate confluence (www.climateconfluence.org) This will be a congenial, low-pressure and fun family ride, something that just about anyone can do. Around thirty miles, no big hills, on the bike path and through mostly quiet and scenic urban streets.

May 22nd:

Youth Speak Out, a frank panel discussion with a wide range of young people about global warming. The views of the younger generation on our current and future environmental problems and how this personally affects them. 6pm-9pm, Lexington Public Library, Lexington, MA

May 24th and 25th:

Northeast RNC training weekend with the Boston Anarchist Black Cross, first day: legal and street tactics training, second day: medic training, Encuentro Cinco, 33 Harrison Ave, Boston.

This happened to my friend:

