



# Let 'em Stay



**P**rior to Christmas, two AWOL American troops lost a final appeal for refugee status - the Supreme Court refused to even hear the case. Then on December 6th a committee on immigration voted for a recommendation orchestrated by the NDP's Olivia Chow. It called for the Canadian government come up with a program to allow Iraq War resisters and families to stay.

Hear any of the Toronto based war resisters speak at a public meeting and patterns become clear in their experiences. Kim Rivera, a red head in her early twenties, served in an Artillery unit in Baghdad, that shipped out first in August 2006. Tales of gore, IED's and guts quickly changed her mind about the mission. The dehumanisation of Iraqi workers forced to etch out employment inside forward operation bases added to it.

Another of the Toronto based war resisters is Phil McDowell. He joined straight after the September 11th attacks during his senior year majoring in IT. He was discharged in June 2006, some months later while traveling, he got notice he was being stop lossed back to Fort Hood, Texas for yet another deployment to Iraq.

The Stop Loss policy is designed to offset the ebb and flow of recruiting patterns. It allows the military to forcibly re-enlist soldiers or involuntarily extend their tour of duty in a war zone – it's a virulent source of antagonism for soldiers.

More of the war resisters are pissed off with what they feel is a de facto economic draft. The military hierarchy pushes its press gangers to target areas where socio-economic background thwarts the goals or ambitions of youth. The military is then presented as a path out.

Then there are benefits, like health, for families too. The partner of another war resister, Jill Hart, knows all about that – she put pressure on her husband to re-enlist so her sick kid could have medical coverage.

Compare the likely persecution these men and women face if deported stateside with the record of the civilian architects of war that avoided donning uniforms but daily play dice with the lives of troops for political capital.

John Ashcroft received six student deferments during Vietnam. Wolfowitz too received the same deferment, allowing him to do graduate work until the draft was over. Bush is the most famous "chicken hawk" of them all - he scored a position in the Texas

Air National Guard, once a popular way to avoid being drafted for combat.

Stateside the campaign is based around Courage to Resist, and braces itself for a Winter Soldier 2008. It's an attempt echo a 1971 event where anti-war veterans testified to war crimes they'd witnessed or even participated in.

Here, War Resisters are gearing up for a political battle to allow them to stay. Exhausted and unable to cope with many more AWOL soldiers, they hope things soon take on the colour of the sixties and grow into a mass movement of support.

At least now there's one way to cheer on the troops, when they start disobeying their superiors and refuse to fight.

Words James R

ONLINE

SUPPORT 'EM>> see warresisters.ca for more.



### Spoken Word Review>>

Ottawa's Free Will slams capital and empire in his latest 70 minute CD opus...



### The Sound of the Police >>

In our regular Ideas section we drag policing in every day life through the analytical lens...



### Panhandling Interview >>

When Ottawa's police chief viciously turned on street youth they were left with no option but to organize Wobbly Style...

about us>>

# Why We Publish

## editorial>>

Common Cause is an Ontario anarchist organization that wants to see anarchists active in every town, neighborhood and workplace across Ontario.

A major focus of our activity is work at those crucial points where working class people are organizing together for control over their lives, the decisions affecting them and against oppression. Our general approach is to involve ourselves with mass movements and work within these movements, in order to promote anarchist methods of organization involving direct democracy and direct action.

The methods of struggle that we promote are a preparation for the running of society along anarchist and communist lines after the revolution.

Common Cause was founded last September in Toronto by anarchists from several Ontario cities. Since then we have constructed our website at [linchpin.ca](http://linchpin.ca), taken part in demonstrations and held public discussion about topics of interest to anarchism. We'd like to hear from any anarchist in Ontario, or moving to Ontario who wants to work with us.

### Local Distributor Contact Details>>

*If you're in Ontario and want to get involved in Common Cause please contact us at [ontarioac@gmail.com](mailto:ontarioac@gmail.com)*

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**LINCHPIN.CA**

This newspaper is a publishing project of the Ontario anarchist organization Common Cause.

With it we hope to help build communication between people engaged in struggle and inform a growing proportion of the population of Ontario of the real facts of such struggles, explains **Andrew Fleming**

We are anarchists so the other related aspect of the paper will be articles that sketch out what anarchism aims to achieve and what the history and current reality of that struggle is, both in Ontario and globally.

To achieve this we are distributing copies where we live and work and at radical events. Each member of Common Cause distributes on average 100 copies of each issue of the paper. It will be a long time before we have a large enough membership to generate a distribution that starts to have the reach of the mainstream media but that is our goal. We want this paper going into every household and workplace in Ontario.

Most of the stories are written by Common Cause members and the paper is put together by delegates from each of the Common Cause Locals. This helps Linchpin to reflect the priorities of the organization as a whole. Which is not to say there is no room for other voices, in particular we carry interviews with people who are not members but who have something interesting to say.

Our aim is to make sure every member of Common Cause is involved not just in the distribution of Linchpin but also in the production of it. We don't aim to have a staff of professional writers that will produce content for everyone to distribute. Rather we see Linchpin as part of a process to develop basic analytical and reporting skills in every member of Common Cause.

The paper is one arm of the Linchpin publishing project, the other is the Common Cause website [linchpin.ca](http://linchpin.ca). This carries additional articles that you won't find in the paper and also carries blogs from Common Cause members where they point out and perhaps discuss anything that catches their eye. Currently this paper appears every two months but the website can be updated on a daily and even hourly



The Linchpin Newsroom: An Arsenal of Ideas.

basis.

Lastly this paper is not simply a way of reporting on struggles or of putting forward anarchist ideas. Its production and distribution is also an organising tool in itself. This may be at the level of editorial delegates reporting what their Locals think are the important for the next issue. Or it may be at the level of each Local deciding where to best distribute that issue, or discussing the contents with people who read it.

As well as discussions on the paper in our Locals all members have a chance to input comments on draft articles in the members only section of our website. At each Common Cause conference each member also has the opportunity to argue for a different focus or even set of goals for Linchpin.

Our aim is to get this paper into the hands of every ordinary person in Ontario. That is one hell of an ambition for a small group of anarchists. We need your help.

At the simplest level you could make some copies of this issue (you'll find a PDF file of it at [linchpin.ca](http://linchpin.ca)) and hand them around where you live, work or study. Or send us a regular donation so we can print more copies. But really what we need are people to join Common Cause and play a part at all levels of the production of Linchpin.

interview>>

# Panhandling Street Unions

When panhandlers in Ottawa came under attack from a the city's new police chief they were left with little option but to begin organizing for mutual defense. Here **David Brons** interviews **Andrew Nellis** about his work with the Ottawa Panhandlers' Union.

LINCHPIN>> What is the Ottawa Panhandlers Union and how was it started?

Andrew Nellis>> The Ottawa Panhandlers Union is a shop of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). It's a real union. What we do is run by the panhandlers themselves. The idea is to empower people on the street to fight for themselves...

In practice we find that our most valuable members are those who have just come off the street or are in the process of getting off the streets. Their lives are somewhat less chaotic than people who are actually on the street although we do have some [key] people who are hardcore street.

LINCHPIN>> Could you give some examples of some of the problems that are faced by panhandlers and homeless people in Ottawa that the Panhandlers Union was formed to help resist.

Andrew Nellis>> I can tell you that although things were bad before the new police chief [Vern White], they've become infinitely worse since. The new police chief has the "broken windows" philosophy. He believes that you can stop big crimes by stopping little crimes. He's ordered his police officers to stop issuing tickets and begin arresting panhandlers. It costs \$185 a day to keep someone in jail and they're more than willing to pay that to keep panhandlers off the street. Providing supported housing is infinitely cheaper but they [instead] prefer using enforcement for something it was never designed to do.

We were forced to start a Copwatch program because the police are openly and blatantly

**"Providing supported housing is infinitely cheaper but they prefer using enforcement for something it was never designed to do."**

breaking the law...Its been reported to us that the police have stolen the panhandlers' money, roughed them up, and told them not to come back or they'd be beaten. One night I had to start guard under the bridge by the Rideau Centre because the street kids there had been informed by a police officer that if they were there when he came back he was going to - and I quote - "boot-fuck" them. So I went there with a recorder and I warned the police that I'd be there all night with my recorder...

We do a lot of advocacy work. We have one member who is schizophrenic and he was picked up in an ambulance and he was [held] involuntarily at the Montfort Hospital in their psychiatric wing. And he requested our assistance in getting his doctors to agree to let him go to school since he has a law degree from Russia and he's in the process of updating his credentials here in Canada. His doctors were concerned about letting him go by himself to his classes so we went there to tell them that we'd have a person willing to go with him to the classes if necessary to assure them that he wouldn't be a danger to himself or others...



Panhandlers' March On Mayday. Photo Killeverything.blogspot.com

LINCHPIN>> How is the Panhandlers Union structured internally?

Andrew Nellis>> The IWW is not an anarchist organization. Our constitution actually forbids us as members from promoting and political or anti-political party. The organization itself runs in an anarchist manner. We have no hierarchy. At meetings everybody takes turns, everybody is expected to be either the chair or recording secretary and at every meeting it changes so that everybody gets to see and develop the skills necessary for running a meeting...It's very gratifying to see someone who started out at the beginning of a meeting very nervous and unsure of themselves actually telling someone like me to shut up and let other people talk.

LINCHPIN>> Do you think that the Panhandlers Union in Ottawa is a model that could be applied to other cities? Has there been interest in trying to develop Panhandlers Unions in other cities?

Andrew Nellis>> Yes. In fact I've been in a number of presentations on street organizing. It's a very different milieu from what most organizers are used to. The street has its own rules. It's stylized and ritualized not all that different than lets say a medieval Chinese court. It's a very different place. When you're dealing

with people as oppressed as people on the street are, it's extremely important not to come across as an authority figure. Often the temptation is there to present yourself as leader and this must be resisted at all costs because the street will try to turn a person into a personality and it will become a cult of personality in which the personality is more important than the movement. While there can be short-term results, eventually the organization falls apart when the person leaves...

The reason to have an organizer when one is organizing on the street is to make sure that there is a structure. The entire reason [many] people are on the street is that they cannot live in a highly structured scenario. There is nothing wrong with this but it is very difficult to keep an organization going when there is no structure to it. In order to ensure that it survives it's necessary to create a tradition. And this takes many, many years. There is no short way to do this. And the way you do this is by giving people successes, by showing them that what you're doing works.

ONLINE

READ ON>> The full version of this interview is available on our website.  
Contact >>  
OttawaPanhandlersUnion@sympatico.ca



SERVICE SECTOR>>

TIRED UNIONS >>

FRAGMENTATION>>

ODD SHIFTS>>

LOW WAGES>>

# From Service Hell to the Revolt of the Precarious



Wall Mart: Super Profits and Staff Straining Smiles.

**T**he history of the working class is a history of remarkable innovation and constant renewal. Whenever the bosses think they have buried forever the threat of workers' revolt, workers find, time and again, the means to fight back. Today, the recent blooming of resistance among workers in the low-wage service-sector is one important sign of a renewed struggle against the bosses and their system, writes **Lucian**.

For decades companies in the service-sector, whether they be giants such as Wal-Mart or smaller locally-owned businesses, have been able to hyper-exploit workers imposing low-wages, irregular schedules, temporary work, unsafe working conditions, harassment and discrimination while racking in super-profits.

While workers have always resisted in many small individual ways (e.g. calling in sick, small acts of re-appropriation/theft) the lack of collective, open resistance has allowed the bosses to gain the upper-hand.

The lack of open resistance has many reasons. Many of the workers who make up the service-sector belong to groups of people, such as women and newly-arrived immigrants, who historically were largely excluded from the traditional labour movement.

Further, the service-sector itself emerged in part as an attack on the traditional factory-based workers' movement, as manufacturing jobs were moved overseas and replaced with low-wage, unorganized service jobs. Service-sector jobs are organized in such a way as

to fragment and isolate workers from each other, which works against the repeat of the unity that emerged among factory workers working together in large numbers under one roof. Production is now organized in networks of small units linked but physically separate from each, other and irregular hours fragment workers across space and time. In other words the very structure of the service-sector is designed to weaken the ability of workers to fight back.

To all of this must be added the failure of the official workers' movement, the mainstream unions. With some exceptions, lost in a self-constructed maze of bureaucracy, legal proceedings, outdated ways of struggle, cooperation with the bosses and top-down forms of organization, the mainstream unions have been unable to offer service-sector workers forms of struggle adequate to their situation. More often the official labour movement has deemed most service-sector jobs as not worth the dues and/or unorganizable. In other words, they blame their own failures to innovate on the

*(Continued on page 5)*

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**FULL ANALYSIS>>** The full version of this article analyzing organizational trends within the service sector is available for download on our website.

(Continued from page 4)

workers!

Thankfully, as is often the case, workers have not sat idly by waiting for the professionals of the official labour movement to come up with solutions. Workers are constantly finding new ways to fight back. From the multitude of lunch-break conversations and minor resistances, covert or open individual resistance, repeated instances of solidarity and isolated moments of collective revolt, there eventually emerge new forms of struggle and alternatives. A popular, collective research project with a historic record of success! We have seen this process take shape over the past decade as resistance to neoliberalism has emerged from a multitude of places and peoples, increasingly connected to each other. And it is becoming clearer that workers in the low-wage service-sector are increasingly joining the fight. The following two examples highlight some of these innovative struggles.

### **AGAINST THE BOSSES' DIVISIONS, ORGANIZING GEOGRAPHICALLY: THE SOUTH STREET WORKERS UNION**

Beginning in August 2003, the Philadelphia-based and Industrial Workers of the World-affiliated South Street Workers Union has been organizing retail and restaurant workers on South Street, the city's largest shopping and restaurant district.

The South Street Workers Union, like all IWW locals, uses a model of organizing called "solidarity unionism" that is radically different from traditional union organizing. Instead of fighting for contracts and legal certification on a per-workplace basis, the goal is to build "one big union" for all South Street workers based on radical democracy. Workers join regardless of where they work and even if they are currently in-

between jobs, as is so often the case in the restaurant and retail sectors. Workers join on an individual basis so that a majority of workers per workplace is not needed. Once a sufficient number of workers have joined, the union then takes direct action on specific grievances and provides much-needed services.

Since its founding the South Street Workers Union has won workers unpaid wages, defended workers who were threatened with dismissal and even deportation, improved working conditions and organized a campaign for cheap public transport with the slogan, "Raise our wages, not the fares!" The South Street Workers Union has also provided a variety of badly-needed services including setting up health, tax and workers' rights clinics. And it has managed to do all this without bureaucracy, long legal entanglements and with low dues ranging from \$1.50 to \$4.50 per week.

The South Street Workers Union is part of a larger revival of the IWW perhaps highlighted most recently by their successful organization of Starbucks workers union in New York and other major US cities. It seems that the IWW's radical democracy, direct action and its "one big union" approach has struck a cord with workers in the low-wage service sector. The result appears to be a promising coming together of the IWW's long-standing radical politics and a renewed workers resistance from below. The IWW has several Canadian locals including in Ottawa and Toronto.

### **AWAKE BUSHWICK! A NEIGHBOURHOOD FIGHTS BACK!**

The 2006 protests led by Latino immigrants in the US caught everyone by surprise with their scope and militancy. The biggest protests in US history took on the form of a general strike as millions of immigrants and allies walked off the

**"The mainstream unions have been unable to offer service-sector workers forms of struggle adequate to their situation."**

job and out of classrooms across the US. More than a demand for citizenship rights, the protests are a major revolt against the low-wage, no-rights economy.

The two are intimately intertwined. The bosses have two options: they move jobs to low-wage areas of the world or, when moving jobs is not an option as in much of the low-wage service-sector (hard to provide "service with a smile" from 1,000 miles away) they bring low-wage workers to where the jobs are.. For this second option to work, the bosses need draconian immigration laws that ensure a large portion of workers have little to no legal rights and that the threat of deportation always hangs over their heads. Act up, demand a living wage, organize and we'll call in the immigration officers to send you packing! As a result, as in Canada, in the US a huge portion of precarious workers are immigrants. Thus when millions of immigrants took to US streets they were expressing not only their anger at proposed immigration laws but also expressing their refusal of being forced into a lifetime of hyper-exploitation.

At the heart of this radical movement are a multitude of grassroots community organizations who have for years been laying the ground work for what might be called the American Spring. One such organization is the Despierta Bushwick or the Awake Bushwick coalition.

Bushwick is an impoverished Brooklyn, NY neighbourhood. The vast majority of residents are hispanic

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or black and the vast majority of them work in low-wage service jobs when there are jobs at all. For years they have suffered from illegal labour practices such as sub-minimum wages, arbitrary firings, unpaid overtime and racism and sexism on the job.

In response, in late 2004 the community organization Make the Road by Walking launched the Awake Bushwick campaign. It was soon joined by other local organizations such as tenant committees, churches and by two unions, the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) and the IWW.

Using a mix of tactics such as community boycotts, direct action, legal action, solidarity unionism as well as single-workplace organizing, the Awake Bushwick campaign has indeed awakened the neighbourhood, mobilizing it against local bosses with tremendous success. The campaign has won hundreds of thousands of unpaid wages for hundreds of workers at several local stores rectifying years of sub-minimum wages and unpaid overtime. At one store, the campaign won back wages for 95 workers. They have also organized unions and won contracts at more than a dozen stores including all ten Footco USA stores winning pay raises, vacations and sick days, health insurance and workers' discounts.

Out of fear of becoming the next targets of the campaign, many local bosses have raised wages and ended a number illegal labour practices on their own. As always, it is our initiative that makes the supposedly impossible possible. And these examples are only a small sample of similar small and large uprisings taking place in the global service sector.



## ideas>>

Woot Woot.

### Sound of Da Police.

Since the time we are young we are saturated with images of the friendly cop, there to help you and your community. We are told the police are here to protect us from the "bad guys" and keep us safe from the salivating hordes of criminals just waiting for an opportunity to harm us. But what really is the function of the police? Who are they really here to protect? Here **Devin K** tries to answer such questions.

For a lot of people, the sight of a cop's cruiser down rolling down the street brings tension rather than comfort. For those of us who don't spend our time in privileged neighborhoods it is easy to realize that the police aren't here to protect us, they are here to accuse us, intimidate us, arrest us, brutalize us - whatever it takes to maintain the existing social order.

The police are the physical manifestation of the power held by those above us, the blue line between the ruler and the subject. The police operate under a veil of legitimacy provided and supported by other authority figures and maintained by corporate media. The fact that their fundamental purpose is violence against us is obscured due to this, and killing people is made easier for them all the time. Using the 50,000 volt Taser is becoming a new favourite pastime for police everywhere. The body count of the "non-lethal" alternative to a firearm, is stacking up over 150 deaths in the US and 17 in the last four years in Canada, as cops continue to kill people for, in many cases, minor incidents.

Some common arguments of those in favour of the police are that they mean well or that they

are also part of the working class, just trying to do their jobs. It may be true that many cops come from working class backgrounds, but it should be fair to say that any working class identity is quickly negated when one decides to serve the interests of those in direct opposition to it. The officer friendly image of pigs helping the elderly cross the street, tipping their hat saying "good day" is a fairy tale for anyone who is seen as undesirable in the self righteous eyes of the police.

The police aren't here to prevent crime and cure society's ills - on the contrary - they are here to enforce the crimes inflicted on everyone on behalf of those who make up the ruling class - politicians, corporations, CEOs, law makers, judges, bosses etc etc.

Laws are made to criminalize the poor, to legitimize locking up those who are victims of systematic violence. This is glaringly obvious in the fact that Aboriginal peoples, who have born the brunt of the most brutal capitalist violence and oppression in Canada, make up 3.8% of the population and 20% of the prison population. How often do you see yuppie scum bags being tossed in prison? Or celebrities? Or cops themselves? When

the rich and their soldiers in blue do get caught breaking laws that would get any one of us locked up, they generally get slapped on the wrist. A favourite "punishment" for the police when they are forced to discipline one of their own is a suspension - with pay! Sounds like a god damn vacation.

Its poor people who are filling the prisons, most of whom are property offenders. The police are here to protect the governments and the ruling class. Anarchist Errico Malatesta put this bluntly: "Government means the right to make the law and to impose it on everyone by force; without a police force there is no government". Who is going to come and kick you to the streets once you can't afford to pay the rent to your lazy asshole landlord? The pigs.

Who is going to arrest the boss who is getting fat off your labour while your family is going hungry? No one. who is going to evict the corporations destroying First Nations' land? Again, no one.

The police are not here to protect us, and by definition are unable to do so. Once you've been condemned to a life of shit it's the job of the police to make sure you don't get too fussy about it.





## graphic novels>>

### Through the Blog of War

One of the most buzzed online web comics of the year finally got a hard copy release this side of the pond last month. It's called *Shooting War* and **James R** has the review.

**Reviewed: Dan Goldman and Anthony Lappe, Shooting War, November 2007 .**

Like many graphic novels, *Shooting War* reaches into a future dystopia to stick some allegories about the present up our ass for some awkward digestion. The setting this time round is a 2011 Iraq. There's a My Lai massacre a minute, a McDonalds on every block and mortars are raining down on what's left of the Green Zone like it was Saigon '75.

Enter Jimmy Burns to the fray. He's your penny dreadful Brooklyn blogger churning out anti-corporate rants all over the east coast but has no mass movement market to hitch his ride to. One day he's doing a story on corporate seizures of property and next thing a terrorist bomb goes off in a Starbucks behind him and he's got the exclusive. Suddenly stuck for footage, mega media bad guys Globalnews steal his video blog feed, turning him into an insta-celebrity. Forced to dance a line between his DIY journalism and

corporate cash, he's shipped to Iraq as one of only four American war correspondent's left there.

This is in part the peeled back re-imagining of Lappe's own jaunt through bombed out Baghdad; there's visual gimmicks and vocab from activist sub-cultures for a sprinkling of further credibility from his years with the Guerrilla News Network.

It's in imagining the incidentals of future war and the political props of our own evolving dystopia that *Shooting War* rocks most. There's the jihad group that's cornering the call centre market with its throat cutting labour standards and the use of a dirty bomb to neutralise competition in the hi-tech squalor of Bangalore. US military has harnessed civilian technologies and next gen consoles to exploit skilled self-trained gamers that control robotic gun-bots engaged in asymmetric war-

fare straight out of one of Mike Davis' urban terror-scapes.

Burns becomes completely divorced from his inception as the netizen every-man, used by mainstream news networks with faces battered from the blogging storm. He takes on this paper cut out April O'Neil as Naomi Klein routine that starts to grate.

In parts the comic seems like a flue of outraged liberal steam before the story arc can end with a final affirmation that our governance by a capitalism with the personality of "Godzilla on crank" really is just an issue of a few bad men.

In comic book land it'll never end up a classic like *Persepolis* or more obviously Joe Sacco's brilliant account of his photo journalism in Palestine. That said, with history unfolding on our screens, context free and maybe, just maybe, sometimes analyzed with tones reserved for a Britney Spears outburst - *Shooting War* nicely drops us in boiling pots of speculation for the crime of complacency.

#### ONLINE

**READ IT AT >>** You can read the full comic online at [www.shootingwar.com](http://www.shootingwar.com). They've produced a glossy animation too that's worth viewing at the same site.

## spoken word >> Slamming Capital



The spirit of community abounds in Ottawa's poetry scene, and nowhere is it more apparent than in the latest CD *The House of Words* by Free Will, a member of the Capital Poetry Collective, writes **Kathryn Hunt**

**Reviewed: The House of Words by Free Will (Dec 2007, 70 mins)**

His album, *The House of Words*, takes its name from the Dogon of Mali, who have a house in each village where members can come to share their ideas and resolutions – as Free Will says, "No chiefs, no masters, no governance. Just community." That celebration of collectivity and rejection of hierarchy resounds in the album, which is full of gracefully written, powerful and rhythmic poems set to music.

The poems speak about materialism, racism, police brutality, the gaps between rich and poor, the genocide waged against native peoples, and the fight against domination and authority, but also celebrate and praise the strength of truth and self-respect, contact with the earth, vegan lifestyles, and the ways in

which all communities are bound by respect, affection, trust, and hope. The words drive the music, which is provided by a wide range of musicians, ranging across cultures, from jazz-like piano riffs to instruments and melodies drawn from reggae, Middle Eastern, African and Indian music, reinforcing the sense of a world-family and the similar, simple things we all have in common.

This album is one of several that have been recorded over the last few years by poets who have been performing their work at Capital Slam, the monthly spoken word show held by the Capital Poetry Collective. Free Will has been onstage at Capital Slam since it began in 2004, and now also takes his work into schools to perform and educate. As he says, "I use my words to empower and

inspire in a world of apathy and cynicism."

A Capital Slam show usually has an open mic, a featured performer and a competition in which the poets perform their work and then are scored by judges chosen from the audience. The poetry is impassioned, often inspiring, funny, or politically charged (or all three at once.) Because of the judging and scoring, it might be assumed that a slam would be competitive, even cutthroat. But Ottawa's slam performers, on the contrary, are an extremely supportive and collectivist group – the competition is completely secondary to the culture of mutual encouragement.

Many first-time performers have been warmly welcomed and encouraged to develop their skills by this group, and as a result spoken word has been booming. Five Ottawa spoken word artists performed this year at the Governor General's Literary Award ceremony, and new poetry series are being started across the province.

#### PURCHASE IT

**CHECK IT OUT>>** ARC Poetry Magazine website at [www.arcpoetry.ca/portage/spoken-word](http://www.arcpoetry.ca/portage/spoken-word) provides listings for these sort of events. For information on getting a copy of *The House of Words*, contact [info@capitalslam.com](mailto:info@capitalslam.com). See [www.myspace.com/thedoctorfreewill](http://www.myspace.com/thedoctorfreewill)

The paper is one arm of Common Cause publishing, the other is our website. There you will find dozens of additional articles and photographs from Common Cause members, as well as announcements and events our members are involved in.

Read more at the Common Cause web site.

[www.linchpin.ca](http://www.linchpin.ca)

### Against The Apartheid Wall

Using festive protests and direct action against the fence and wall, Anarchists Against The Wall have become well known for their creative modes of resistance.

### Book review: Free women of Spain by Martha A. Acklesberg

<http://www.linchpin.ca/node/521>

Karine looks at a book that summarizes the experiences of women anarchist organizers during the Spanish revolution

### Review: Persepolis

<http://linchpin.ca/node/522>

R. Rosen went to see Persepolis, a film based on the comic strip about the experiences of a young women during the Iranian revolution and the years that followed.

### Review: Alan Sears on the infrastructure of dissent

<http://linchpin.ca/node/524>

Alex went to a talk at McMasters University by Alan Sears and sees a point to his argument that we need collective investigation into today's movements and oppressed communities.

## media>>

# Challenging Corporate Media.

Independent media has a rich, long history. Linchpin is following in and updating a tradition known for dissent, diversity, and the creation, cultivation and communication of new and challenging ideas, writes **Greg Macdougall**

While there may be longstanding problems with the way mainstream media works, what doesn't have such a long and storied history is the rise of 'mega-media', the mass corporate media institutions that put control of ever more of our society's means of communication into the hands of fewer and fewer for-profit companies. It is only in the past decade or two that this problem has reached critical levels, yet it's been ushered in as if this is 'business as usual.'

But it isn't business as usual. Laws regulating media have been changed, media companies have been bought up and/or merged at an alarming rate, and the media landscape is vastly different now than it was a generation ago.

Not only does this result in a distracting 'if it bleeds it leads' monoculture that delivers a worldview encouraging non-action and the acceptance of an insane status quo, but there is the continuing problem of an inherent conflict of interest between what is good for society and what makes money. We need to seriously consider the fundamental purpose of our society's communication tools and structure.

As Robert McChesney states, "regardless of what a progressive group's first issue of importance is, its second issue should be media and communication, because so long as the media are in corporate hands, the task of social change will be vastly more difficult, if not impossible, across the board."

This is advice that could be heeded by anyone looking to change the world for the better. Media activists have long been involved in creating alternative media, but there are other forms of activity that are also important in dealing with the problems we now face in our communication structures.

Robert Hackett of Simon Fraser University has classified four major strands of media activism:

- "influencing content and practices of mainstream media" (ex: fair.org, mediachannel.org)
- "advocating for reform of government policy/regulation of media in order to change the very structure of media institutions" (ex:



Activists Are Struggling To Build Participatory Medias

democraticmedia.ca, mediareform.ca, freepress.net)

- "building independent, democratic and participatory media" (ex: indymedia.org, independentmedia.ca, mediademocracyday.ca)
- "changing the relationship between audiences and media, chiefly by empowering audiences to be more critical of hegemonic media" (ex: media-awareness.ca, aml.ca, adbusters.org) [two sites that focus on more than one strand are mediademocracy.ca and prwatch.org]

This past decade, there has been a heartening level of action around these issues. In 2000, an independent media conference in Waterloo was held; in 2001 there was one in Toronto. In 2004, there was the Uncensoring Media Morphosis conference in Ottawa, and the Community Media Convergence in Guelph. This past year, there was the Propaganada Model conference in Windsor, featuring Noam Chomsky, and the first annual Media Democracy

conference in Montreal. Lower-key meetings keep on being held. And since 2001, Media Democracy Day has been celebrated in late October in cities across the country.

Choose to work on one or more of the four forms of media activism, and connect with others - either locally or further afield - to make a difference.

**"Media companies have been bought up and/or merged at an alarming rate, and the media landscape is vastly different now than it was a generation ago."**

## CONTACTS

**CHECK IT OUT>>** Media Matters, an OPIRG-Ottawa action group, will be hosting a workshop entitled "Organizing around Media and Communication" on Sat, Feb 9 at Trent University in Peterborough, as part of the Community Movements: Building Solidarity for Social Change conference. Contact [mediamatters@canada.com](mailto:mediamatters@canada.com) for more, or visit the conference website at [buildingsolidarityconference2008.20fr.com](http://buildingsolidarityconference2008.20fr.com). See [www.projectcensored.org](http://www.projectcensored.org) too.

**SATURDAY MARCH FIRST  
THE CASBAH - HAMILTON  
306 KING ST. WEST - AA LIC  
3 PM TO 7 PM - SIX BUCKS**

**THE SUICIDE PILOTS  
THE FALLOUT  
BROADCAST ZERO  
BLACKJACK**

**LOCK TERROR**

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