

THE STRUGGLE AROUND HOUSING IN AMERICA

Dear Readers,

On this page we are highlighting some of the housing struggles raging across the nation. It's becoming clear that we either have a new system or starve. The housing crisis brings this into stark relief. Here is a social system that can no longer do the most fundamental thing a human society must do: shelter people. The corporations who own this country cannot give up private property. We can only win this fight by uniting all the housing struggles under a common demand: we all have a right to decent, safe housing, regardless of our ability to pay for it, and we must demand that the government guarantee this. SEND YOUR HOUSING ARTICLES TO THE PEOPLE'S TRIBUNE. ORDER BUNDLES OF PAPERS TO DIS-TRIBUTE. Call 800-691-6888 for more information.

The Struggle and Victory for Scott Carver Homes

BY JOSEPH PHELAN
MIAMI WORKERS CENTER

In 2001, Miami Workers Center (MWC) and its grassroots organizing project LIFFT (Low-Income Families Fighting Together) successfully stopped the destruction of 750 units at Liberty Square Projects, affectionately known as the Pork n' Beans. We stormed the U.S. Housing and Urban Development building in Washington, DC and demanded that the HOPE VI grant be denied.

At the same time another HOPE VI grant had already been approved to demolish the historic James E. Scott and Carver Projects. With this demolition, 850 public housing units were to be destroyed and replaced with merely 80 units of public housing and town houses.

Utilizing the momentum of the victory at the Pork n' Beans, MWC/LIFFT began aggressively organizing to reverse the Scott Carver HOPE VI plan. Between 2002 and 2006 MWC and LIFFT were able to force some improvements in the plan through direct action, civil rights lawsuits, coalition work, and community awareness building. However, the county displaced all 1,129 families between 1999-2004 and demolished all but one building by 2006.

The displaced residents were scattered throughout the region and received little of their promised services. In an unprecedented housing boom, many residents were "lost" by the housing system that was supposed to look after their interests. An unholy pirate union between private developers, county commissioners, and agency bureaucrats ruled the day.

While grassroots members militantly fought this powerful alliance, the issue of Scotts rarely made it out of the African-American community.

Last fall The Miami Herald's series "House of Lies" publicly exposed the corruption and collusion between county government and private developers. It showed that tens of millions of taxpayer dollars for affordable housing had been stolen, misused or squandered. Scott Carver Homes was a glaring example of the scandal.

Even though the HOPE VI plan at Scotts was central to the county scandal and former residents were central to the coalition's fight, the county bureaucracy held fast to the original HOPE VI plan. There we erected a "Find Our People" name wall to list and find all displaced residents of Scotts. The county had lost track of over half of the displaced families.

In five weeks of activity the campaign located 240 Scott Families. The Scott site became a central gathering and networking place for displacees.

In the face of building momentum, the county moved to shut down the site. The result was a major stand-off between members and police, which resulted in a stand-



At the recent US Social Forum in Atlanta, Miami Workers Center members marched with the Right to the City Alliance, which fights gentrification.

PHOTO/MIAMI WORKERS CENTER

down by the county administration. One week later on Valentines Night, the police came back, evicted members, and fenced off the site.

Meanwhile, USHUD was threatening to take over the local housing agency and put it into federal receivership. While the county attempted to demonstrate administrative improvements, undersecretary for Housing at USHUD, Orlando Cabrera, who is also heavily connected to Miami's powerful Latin Builders Association, seemed determined to force a federal takeover.

In this context, the newly hired head of MDHA, Kris Warren, reached out to MWC/LIFFT to dialogue about HOPE VI and the potential federal takeover. The result of these conversations is a historic breakthrough agreement, made on February 27, 2007.

The agreement is a huge step for self-determination of the poor African American community in Miami. It guarantees one-for-one replacement of low-income housing, the right to return for all displaced residents and broader community oversight.

With this accord, MWC/LIFFT entered a tactical alliance with leadership of county government to stave off a federal takeover.

This is one of the most significant housing agreements for low-income communities in Miami-Dade history. It also represents a potentially watershed moment for the predominantly African-American community of Liberty City. This could be a huge step in reclaiming the self-determination of the community, its land and reshaping the neighborhood in the interests of those who live there.

We are still fighting to make sure this agreement moves forward. In the ensuing months we have gotten over 100 displaced families re-housed and connected with services after the county had "lost" them.

We surely are not out of the woods yet, but we are moving, always moving forward.



Pam Kinkaid PHOTO/MIKE RHODES

Demand justice for Pam Kinkaid

BY SANDRA REID

Pam Kinkaid, a courageous leader in the struggle against the City of Fresno's destruction of homeless people's property, has brain damage and is being taken off life support. Mike Rhodes, editor of the Community Alliance, said "Pam went through the door to an outside balcony at the nursing home (an alarm is supposed to go off) and somehow went over the edge. It is not clear if Pam slipped and fell, jumped, was thrown, or slipped over the side. Her brain was compressed into the stem of the spinal cord.

"Pam was one of the many homeless people who you wouldn't know was homeless unless she told you. For this to happen to her speaks volumes about the tragic conditions in our country" said Jeremy Alderson, Director of the Homelessness Radio Marathon.

Many unanswered questions remain. One, how did it happen? Two, why did Pam receive such outrageously bad care? Three, Pam was put in a nursing home recently because she had been severely attacked. Her boyfriend was an eyewitness to her attack. He said that the police are implicated. Yet there has been no investigation. "We need to demand, in the strongest terms possible, that we learn the truth," said Mike Rhodes.

A decision has been made to donate Pam's organs so others can live. **Justice for Pam Kinkaid.**

Under attack!

BY JOHN SLAUGHTER

ATLANTA—On the opening day of the United States Social Forum (USSF) in Atlanta the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless, located at Peachtree and Pine, organized and led a rally at City Hall to protest the evictions from and the demolition of public housing in Atlanta. During the USSF, Peachtree and Pine was a hotbed of activity as they played host to the thousands who came to Atlanta to talk about fundamental change.

In retaliation, the city government and corporations have launched an all-out assault on the Task Force, aimed at shutting it down. Over 500 homeless persons a day are provided services and shelter at Peachtree and Pine, and the Homeless Task Force has long been a leader in the fight to end homelessness and to provide housing for all in the city. The government has now moved to defund the Task Force, ac-

curring it of "enabling" and "warehousing" the homeless, and for being a magnet for crime and drugs.

It is clear that what is really going on is a war on the poor, but the Homeless Task Force is in the way. The area in which Peachtree and Pine is located is already undergoing gentrification, and the demonizing and criminalizing of the homeless is part of the campaign to have the poor "disappeared" from this new haven for the rich. And the developers can hardly wait to get their hands on the property at Peachtree and Pine.

The city government, in league with the corporate interests represented by Central Atlanta Progress, may have fired the first shot, but the battle is not over by a long shot. The Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless vows that it is not going anywhere, and the homeless, the poor and progressive forces throughout the city are rallying to their cause.



A rally at Atlanta's City Hall in June to protest the evictions from and the demolition of public housing in Atlanta.

PHOTO/USSF/ATLANTA



There were at least three police cruisers and six or seven officers involved to sort out the alleged "crime" of Sherri Williams, a homeless woman needing to use the bathroom in a Fresno, California McDonald's.

PHOTO/MIKE RHODES

Use a restroom: Go to jail!

BY MIKE RHODES

Sherri Williams was cited by the police because she tried to use the restroom at McDonald's at Olive and highway 99 in Fresno. Williams and her husband Al are regular customers at McDonald's. They're homeless and she uses a wheelchair. Al bought a cup of coffee and Sherri headed to the restroom. That is when McDonald's manager Michelle Torres said "I need you to go, you're not purchasing anything." Al said that Sherri needed to use the restroom and after that she would buy something. Torres went to summons a police officer.

The officer arrived and said that "this is a private restaurant and they can refuse service to anybody." Al pointed out that they can only refuse service if they have a reason. The officer said if she does not leave "she is going to be arrested."

Sherri was taken outside and given a citation - PC 602.1 for "Interfering with Business" by officer D.J. Onruh that demands she show up in criminal court on September 5. Sherri and Al believe that they are being discriminated against because they are homeless and Sherri is in a wheelchair. In a previous letter Sherri sent to McDonald's, she wrote about an earlier incident where there was "no legal cause or justification to be escorted out of McDonalds by a Fresno City Police Officer."

Sherri wrote "I have been a regular patron of this location for several years and never have had regular customers make complaints about my use of the restroom nor harassed by McDonald staff. I may have left a slight mess when using the restroom but it is partly because of my health, limited condition and the inadequate dispenser in the women's restroom. The policies certainly violate the Ameri-

cans with Disabilities Act as it relates to accommodating an individual with a disability."

My daughter and filmmaker Simone Whalen-Rhodes arrived with her video camera. Torres came out and said "I'm going to have to ask you to leave, you can not video on our property." Simone responded that she has a legal right to be there and refused to leave. I arrived, hearing Torres say "sir, you are not allowed to take pictures... and I'm asking you to leave." I replied that just because Torres didn't want me there does not revoke my rights as a journalist. Torres eventually went inside and the issue was dropped.

The police were now aware that this incident was being documented and decided not to arrest Sherri. Soon, a Sargeant and more officers arrived. The Sargeant asked for my identification and informed me that I could keep my photos and the video. This was tempered with a threat that they might get a court order to use them in a criminal proceeding. The officer told Sherri he was issuing the citation because she was "trespassing and interfering with the business." Sherri was finger printed and signed the citation.

It is outrageous that homeless and disabled people are being denied service at McDonalds. McDonald's response has not been to apologize or to say that they will provide restroom services for disabled and homeless people or any customer. It has been to send out corporate managers and go to businesses in the area to sign affidavits attacking Al and Sherri, saying they are disruptive and not welcome. Community people are not tolerating this injustice and came out to demonstrate at the McDonalds to defend Sherri's right to use the restroom.

For more on this story, go to indybay.org (Central Valley).