

Marching On: Ending Poverty

POOR PEOPLE'S ECONOMIC HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

Volume 4, Issue 1

Sept 2008

Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign Mission Statement

The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign is committed to uniting the poor across color lines as the leadership base for a broad movement to abolish poverty. We work to accomplish this through advancing economic human rights as named in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as the rights to food, housing, health, education, communication and a living wage job.

Poverty afflicts Americans of all colors and backgrounds. We are mothers, fathers, children, and grandparents; we are the unemployed, the working poor, the downsized, the homeless, the victims of welfare reform and NAFTA, the cast-asides of the new economy; we are social workers, religious leaders, labor leaders, artists, lawyers, and other people of conscience; we are young and old; we live in rural areas and in urban centers. We have all suffered and we have all struggled, but now we are united against the prevailing conditions and around our vision of a society where we all have the right to health care, housing, living wage jobs, and access to quality primary, secondary, and higher education.



PPEHRC Historical Background

In the United States, where poverty is often seen as a necessary evil, the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC) has taken the lead in framing the debate around welfare reform, poverty, homelessness, health care, hunger, and income security in the context of **human rights**. The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign in the United States is a national campaign of more than 100 poor people's organizations made up of women, men and children of all races. Founded in 1998 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the UDHR, the PPEHRC organizes for the Economic and Social Human Rights guaranteed in the UDHR.

In the United States, the richest country in the world, increasing numbers of people are having to struggle harder and harder to survive. Despite record corporate profits, in the past twenty years most people in this country have experienced falling wages, corporate downsizing and underemployment. The 1996 welfare law and NAFTA have led to increasing hunger, homelessness, denial of health care and death. Despite clear shortcomings in the U.S. welfare system, our welfare reform is being used as a model as other countries debate their safety net policies.

Every day, the PPEHRC is involved in the organizing of public housing activists in Chicago, farm workers in Florida, temporary laborers in Atlanta, unemployed miners in West Virginia, Katrina victims, homeless families, victims of NAFTA, immigrants, domestic workers, women whose children have been taken away because they do not have housing, heat, food or water, people who are dying or who have lost loved ones because they do not have health care. For the families that form the PPEHRC, every day is a matter of life and death: as families die in house fires for not having safe heat, as children die unsupervised because mothers are forced to work under welfare reform, as people die without health care, as children are removed for economic reasons and placed in violent or negligent foster families or institutions, as people freeze to death with no where to live, and as every day another leader or loved one is lost to drugs or the prisons.

The PPEHRC works every day with virtually no funding to organize the poor of all races across the US, to meet their basic needs, document their stories, build leadership and organization, and involve them in a human rights movement in the US, and to ensure that poverty and economic human rights violations in the US are made visible to the world- through local, national and international marches, Truth Commissions, Human Rights Tribunals, International Legal cases, close relationships with movements for human rights internationally, human rights organizing trainings across the US, Poverty Summits, civil disobedience, encampments of the homeless on vacant land and

Everyday a Preventable Katrina: The Hidden War in the US

The poor in the United States speak out about the struggle to survive and to organize for human rights under the Bush

The largest multi-racial movement of the poor in the US speaks to the people of Europe and the world about the truth of the US economic model and the thousands of people who die every year from this model WITHIN the US, and about the PPEHRC's efforts to organize the poor of all races in the US and to unite this movement with people around and movements around the world in an urgent effort to build "**Another US, Another Europe, Another World.**"

Report back by members of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC-US) and a showing of a short film by Swedish journalist, Lennart Kjörling, from events held during last week's Republican National Convention in US. Events led by the PPEHRC included a **Bushville** encampment of poor and homeless families from across the United States, a **National Truth Commission** on economic human rights violations in the US, and a massive **March for Our Lives: Money for Health Care and Housing, Not for War!** led by the poor of the US during the RNC .

PPEHRC's presentation will also include a discussion about police intimidation and repression against protesters and the press to prevent the voices of the poor from being heard.



**We do not seek pity.
We do seek power to end conditions that threaten all of us
and deny us our economic human rights.**

PPEHRC Leads 'March For Our Lives' During the Republican National Convention in the USA

On Sept 2nd, PPEHRC led a massive **March for Our Lives: Money for Health Care and Housing, Not for War!** to the seat of the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA.

The **PPEHRC's March for Our Lives**, one of the largest marches at the RNC, followed a month-long series of events by poor and homeless families from PPEHRC to ensure that the voices, stories and demands of the US poor be heard during the US elections.

Last week's march took place in a city heavy militarized - just days before more than 100 riot police, sharpshooters and others had evicted 20 PPEHRC families with children in the middle of night as we attempted to set up our Bushville encampment. In the preceding days, press, attempting to cover PPEHRC's activities, had been shoved into elevators and out of the State Capitol, our lawyer had been denied entry to the State Capitol to meet with us, members of the press had had their notes and footage and cameras confiscated, hundreds more press and protestors were unlawfully and violently arrested, and tear gas and rubber bullets had been used on peaceful protestors. (See reports on PPEHRC website)

PPEHRC's September 2nd **March for Our Lives** was surrounded by riot police with tear gas and rubber bullets, military in fatigues, sharpshooters, police and military in armored vehicles, helicopters, unmarked cars, on horses and bicycles who repeatedly attempted to sabotage our march and our message by instilling fear in families attempting to march and by diverting attention from our activities.

In the midst of heavy militarization and police violence, PPEHRC led thousands of people - poor and homeless families from across the US, public housing residents, residents of impoverished Indigenous reservations, leaders of the American Indian Movement, veterans, the disabled, immigrants from all over the world, families who lost children in Iraq, students, religious people, artists, poor youth, labor organizers, truckers who have gone bankrupt because of high gas prices, people without medical care, and many others suffering in the current economy - in a massive march for "Economic Human Rights.

The march, one of the largest of the week, ended with the delivery of a Citizens Arrest of members of the Bush Administration for "Crimes for Humanity."

The March for Our Lives was preceded by a statewide caravan by PPEHRC across the state of Minnesota to meet with fellow poor families, a **Bushville** encampment of poor and homeless families from across the US; a **National Truth Commission** on economic human rights violations in the US, and a sit-in by members of the PPEHRC at the Minnesota State Capitol to ensure that the stories and demands poor be seen and heard during the RNC.



PPEHRC & the European Social Forum

The Social Forum process (World, European, etc) is fundamental to our efforts to link the poor of the US with movements around the world. Our movement of the poor in the US will literally die – like so many movements before us in our country and around the world – if we do not succeed in linking up with our brothers and sisters around the world. This is both strategic and practical.

As our government attempts to keep us apart, we recognize that our interests are one and the same with the poor and with workers in every corner of the world. Whether we live in shantytowns, homeless shelters, impoverished farms, on the streets in the United States, Brazil, Iraq, South Africa, France or India, our common enemy is this system, which has sentenced billions of us to hunger, homelessness, war and death by preventable disease.

We have come to the ESF this year, and for the last 6 years we have participated in the WSF process on many levels, because our lives and the survival and success of our movement depend on our breaking our invisibility and participating in international processes with those who share our vision.

The strategy of PEHRC is to organize the American people, and especially the growing new class of people with no future in this economy, and to unite our growing movement with the global movement for “Another World”, which we believe is both possible and urgent.

We believe that a major challenge to the Left worldwide is to help break the isolation and invisibility of the poor of the empire – because we think that the poor of the U.S. have a very strategic role to play in this global process.



Too long, the reality of widespread poverty and repression of the poor and our organizing efforts WITHIN the US have been hidden, and the multi-racial poor of the US kept isolated from global efforts to bring about a different world. This is dangerous to both us and to movements worldwide. For as long as the myth about the “American Dream” is perpetuated, they can keep forcing this deadly model on people worldwide.

And as long as the people – and especially the poor and workers of all races - of the United States are invisible and unorganized, we as a global movement will not be able to really confront the US empire and the socioeconomic model which is killing all of us.

The power of the U.S. empire to impose its economic model and its military control around the world depends on the lack of consciousness and independent political organization among the victims of the same system within the belly of the beast.

As a result of automation and corporate globalization, there is a new class of poor in the US – a growing class of tens of millions of people of all races, urban and rural, who are permanently excluded from the economy - unemployed & underemployed, landless, homeless, without access to healthcare, food, heat, water, education and other basic necessities. Tens of millions who can't survive & who have no future in this economy, *regardless of who becomes the next president of the United States*.

This state of total war which we are living – economic, political, social, psychological and military – is about keeping us disorganized, unconscious and disunited from the poor around the world.

And we have also fought very hard – against many losses and many dangers – to keep building this movement, the largest multi-racial movement of the poor in the US, both because our own lives depend on it, and because we think that its success is crucial to the global process.

So we are here also at the ESF to put out a challenge to the people of Europe and the world...that if we are truly serious about defeating neoliberalism and building *Another World* – we must figure out how to support a movement of poor and working people of all races within the belly of the beast.

The BATTLE to calm the KATRINAS OF POVERTY

Sept. 4, 2008 by Albur Ruiz

New York Daily News

It was fortunate that Gustav, the monster hurricane that killed more than 90 people in the Caribbean, fizzled out before hitting New Orleans three years after Katrina devastated the Big Easy and exposed to the world the heartless incompetence of the Bush administration.

It was fortunate because the country was spared much of Gustav's destructive force. It was fortunate because New Orleans has not recovered from Katrina, and thousands of its people remain displaced, living in dire poverty and are increasingly hopeless about the future.

Marches and protests in New Orleans and here marked the disaster's third anniversary by demanding an end to the displacement of low-income people in many cities around the country.

"There are preventable Hurricane Katrinas happening in this country every day - people living without access to food, housing and healthcare," said Cheri Honkala, national organizer for the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign.

"On the three-year anniversary of Katrina, we demand our political leaders provide resources to people living in poverty."

Not that Gustav was totally harmless. At least 16 deaths were reported as a result of the storm in the U.S. and the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minn., was severely damaged - if not by the wind and the rain - by Gustav forcefully bringing back memories of President Bush's disastrous performance three years before.

At the scaled down GOP convention, the real drama was taking place in the streets outside the Saint Paul's Xcel Energy Center.

More than 280 people were arrested including Associated Press photographer Matt Rourke and Democracy Now! TV and radio show host Amy Goodman, along with producers Sharif Abdel Kouddous and Nicole Salazar.

A video of Goodman's arrest can be seen at

"Amidst the glossy images of the Republican National Convention, low income families from around the country have come to protest the policies that have kept them living in poverty," Honkala said. The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign was one of several anti-poverty organizations protesting at the convention.

Here in New York more than 300 people remembered the third anniversary of Katrina with a march through Chinatown and the lower East Side to express solidarity with the displaced residents of the Gulf Coast.

The march, organized by Right to the City NYC, a coalition of more than a dozen community organizations and other groups, also wanted to show that low-income communities here share many of the same problems with the people of New Orleans.

"People here are not satisfied, they are not happy," Nova Strachan, 26, said from New Orleans where she went to participate in the commemoration of Katrina's third anniversary. She is the public housing organizer of Mother on the Move, a Bronx organization that belongs to the Right to the City coalition.

"These folks are fed up, tired, they have been waiting for three years. As we do in New York they need housing, schools, health care but they are in a worse situation."

Joetta Rogers, 56, survived the destruction of her home by Katrina in Mobile, Ala. and now lives in the Bronx. A member of the New York Solidarity Coalition for Katrina/Rita Survivors she took part in the Aug. 29 march.

She aptly summarized her reality, and that of the Katrina survivors and the poor people of New York.

"People can no longer afford to live in their own communities, they are being pushed out. The government needs to reinvest in communities. We need housing, health services and better schools here as well as in New Orleans."



Bushville encampment "Tent city" where poor and homeless families from across the US, members of the PPEHRC, stayed before marching at the RNC on September 2nd (2008) in St. Paul, Minnesota, US.



Amy Goodman of Democracy NOW! interviews Cheri Honkala (Excerpt of Interview)

AMY GOODMAN: It's the fortieth anniversary of King's Poor People's March that he started, and then was assassinated, but continued. What is the relevance of that to today? Were you inspired at all by that?

CHERI HONKALA: Our movement is very much trying to take up the baton where Dr. Martin Luther King left off. We now have the largest multiracial movement of poor people in this country. The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign can be found on—it has over 200 affiliates. We have members like the Immokalee farm workers, to the Coalition to Protect Public Housing, to trailer park residents in Minnesota, to some of the largest Indian reservations, you name it. And we have one message, which is, we're calling for the elimination of poverty in this country, not the reduction, no more band-aids, not a bigger and better welfare system, but an elimination to the kind of conditions that we're faced with.

AMY GOODMAN: The message to end poverty in this country, will you talk about the corporate media and how it deals with these issues, or doesn't?

CHERI HONKALA: Yeah, I mean, I've been involved in large demonstrations for like the last twenty years, and I'm very ashamed of my home state. I've never seen so many reporters like yourself being detained. A Channel 5 reporter was trying to cover a story of us; he was thrown into an elevator. A couple other folks that we know that were trying to cover some of our events were also detained and then later released on two different occasions. We were inside the Capitol trying to have a peaceful demonstration during regular open hours of the Capitol, and the reporters were literally locked out of the Capitol and unable to come in, even though they showed their credentials. And so, I don't quite get what is so horrible about covering a story of women and children and the elderly and people of all colors trying to come together to talk about the day-to-day reality of their lives.

AMY GOODMAN: You know, I was astounded when I talked to the St. Paul police chief yesterday, and, you know, with the arrest, how is he instructing the press to—the police to deal with the press, and how are we supposed to operate when we are trying to cover this and the police arrest us. And he said you can embed yourselves with the police department. And you saw Rick Rowley, Big Noise filmmaker in this piece, he's covering the riot police, and he sees there the Fox News reporter. As they're pushing him away, she's in the midst of them. And he yells to her, "Are you embedded with the

CHERI HONKALA: Yeah. I mean, for us, that's no surprise, when it comes to Fox News. But we're just absolutely outraged. And, you know, like my son said, "Mom, when you get up this morning, don't read any of the papers. You know, don't even turn on the television," because regardless of the fact that poor people came together from all walks of life, every color, every age, yesterday, regardless of being terrorized for actually the last month—we had two Bushvilles that were knocked down, encampments. When we came —

AMY GOODMAN: Bushvilles?

CHERI HONKALA: Yeah, we set up encampments, particularly during the Republican National Convention, for some place for people to sleep, because we can't afford the W or the Hilton. And so, people were staying at the Bushville, and our first Bushville that we set up on Harriet Island, the first night we were surrounded by 200 police officers in riot gear. They turned on the sprinklers on our children while they were sleeping, turned off all the park lights and drove their police vehicles up onto the lawn with their brights on. And myself and a couple of our other leaders were then arrested, and our Bushville was torn down. Later through the week, they brought dogs to our Bushville, while the kids were sleeping, let the dogs bark and scare the kids, and then periodically would just go by and drive up and run their sirens at 2:00, 3:00 in the morning, just to make people afraid.

AMY GOODMAN: Cheri Honkala, can you describe the conditions of the poor, the daily challenges faced?

CHERI HONKALA: Yeah. Actually, later this afternoon, I leave to go to a funeral in Philadelphia, where a woman, a good friend of mine, Esther, struggled her whole life, because she was right on the borderline in terms of not being able to qualify for medical assistance. And I think she spent each and every day trying to figure out how to pay for the many different medications that she had. So her whole life was about how does she get up every morning and figure out how to pull together, you know, that \$80, \$90, or whatever, for one individual prescription after another. And these were in the last dying days of her life. People shouldn't have to live like this.



A Report from Outside the Republican National Convention

September 2, 2008

As a prelude to today's scheduled Poor People's March from Mears Park to the arena site of the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, the 2008 National Truth Commission took testimony on economic human rights violations in the U.S.

Hosted by the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, the Sept. 1 event held at Christ Lutheran Church, just a few blocks from the RNC, was a multi-ethnic gathering of people not wearing outlandish convention-style costumes, or holding state placards.

There were cheers Monday night but not for a presidential nominee, but for the many speakers who came forward and testify not about the virtue of a political party using Madison Avenue slogans, but about the injustices they have faced in the greatest country on Earth.

"I can not afford health care," Annette Toney of Cleveland, Ohio told the audience. "I do not want to depend on others."

Ann Patterson, who has worked as a nurse for 17 years in Minneapolis, says she has seen her monthly health insurance premiums leaped from zero to now \$500. "My husband recently lost his job," explains Patterson. "We've used our credit cards, savings and our children's savings. We are not able to make it. It is stressful."

Also a mother of five children, two of which are dealing with regular health concerns, Patterson adds that despite almost two-decades experience on her job, she has seen her job lay off others with even more seniority than hers. "I have no comfort that I will have a job tomorrow," she notes.

Rev. Gregory Lockett of Tampa, Florida is dealing with high blood pressure but publicly admitted Monday night that he had on many occasions become "dishonest" in getting his medications "because if I told the truth, they (officials) would told me to go someplace else," he points out.

"The (federal) government can spend millions on a war but can't take care of its people," says Carol Sawall-Smith of Chicago. "We need to do something about the health care in our country."

Not only health care, but housing concerns also was testified about.

Doanta Davis of Louisville, Kentucky and his two children live in a crowded one-bedroom apartment. "They don't understand any of this," says the single father of his children's constant bewilderment of their current living conditions.

William "J.R." Flemming of Chicago says, "(It) is a fact" that the U.S. is in violation of human rights. "I am human. I deserve human rights. If you won't do it for me, do it for my (ten) children."

These violations have been ongoing and "is being largely ignored," says Peter Brown, a Minneapolis attorney who specializes on human rights complaints. "The right to housing, health care and education is the right of everybody, everywhere," he surmises, adding that not only the U.S. is responsible but "we also bear some responsibility, especially in holding (elected) officials accountable."

After its first day, in which activities either were curtailed or postponed because of Hurricane Gustav, the GOP convention is back on track today.

But Monday's night "truth" hearing went on as scheduled. Too bad the GOP faithful, the ones with the funny hats, couldn't had boarded their bus and rolled down a few blocks and heard these folk talk.

Then again, hearing the truth is not what most conventioners want to hear.



March for Our Lives, RNC, Sept 2, 2008

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