



In the USA, Thousands Mobilize for World Zero Eviction Days: Initiatives of the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC)

This October across the USA, many thousands will publically demand an end to evictions as they claim the human right to housing. Member groups of the **Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC)** are organizing marches, demonstrations, media campaigns, tent cities, housing “take-overs” and “take-backs.” And in the face of evictions, many families, supported by their neighbors, are refusing to leave their homes.

For many decades in the USA, owning a home has symbolized “the American dream.” But the images of happy homeowners portrayed in the movies and the media, while never accurate for many millions, have become a cruel nightmare for many millions more. Throughout the USA today homeless people hide under bridges and in the woods in shame and fear of arrest or removal of their children by the state. Thousands more bravely organize tent cities in defiance of the law.

Homelessness is not a new problem in the USA, but the ranks of homeless and displaced persons have swelled exponentially since the onset of the global economic crisis. Millions of families face bank foreclosure of their homes and potential homelessness. The very banks that have been “bailed out” by the US government are evicting families that can no longer pay their mortgages into the streets or, if they are fortunate, into the overcrowded homes of friends and family.

These families join the millions displaced by Katrina and other hurricanes who have been abandoned by government officials—many of whom eagerly support redevelopment projects for tourism and gambling. They join the millions of unemployed low-wage workers who had never been able to own homes, workers who paid outrageous rents to live in poor housing. And they join the hundreds of thousands of former residents of public housing that has been torn down to make room for condominiums, commercial development, or “affordable” housing that few poor families can afford.

PPEHRC is a USA national network of over 100 base groups, most of them led by the poor, organizing to end poverty and claim the economic human rights defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN in 1948. At its national conference in July, PPEHRC’s member groups unanimously endorsed the World Zero Evictions Days and vowed to participate in the World Assembly of Inhabitants. In addition, PPEHRC representatives will present testimony to the UN Special Rapporteur for Housing Rights at hearings to be held in November.

Listed on the following pages are just a few of the PPEHRC groups’ Zero Evictions Day initiatives that will take place in the USA. Others will be added as plans are finalized.

For further information about these initiatives, contact Cheri Honkala, PPEHRC National Organizer, at cherippehrc@hotmail.com or 1-267-439-8419 (USA).



Minneapolis, Minnesota: The “Minnesota Five” will travel to Washington, DC on Zero Eviction Day to meet with congressional representatives to demand a moratorium on evictions. (See details in separate entry below.)

Philadelphia and York, Pennsylvania: In the city called “the birthplace of the nation” thousand are homeless or living in overpriced, marginal housing. A hundred miles west, elderly residents of a trailer park face forced eviction. The Kensington Welfare Rights Union has begun its actions to save their homes. (See details in separate entry below.)

Chattanooga, Tennessee: CHANGER-PPEHRC’s second annual Chattanooga March for Our Lives on October 2nd will target banks and a city government that is destroying the tent cities of the homeless. (See details in separate entry below.)

Louisville, Kentucky: Women in Transition (WIT) is a group that has focused for many years on the removal of children from their parents when the cause of the removal—or impediments to return of the children—is linked to violations of economic human rights. Nationwide, it is estimated that a third to half the children in foster care could go home immediately if their parents had safe, affordable housing. Thus, the right to housing has become an urgent issue for WIT members. Recently WIT won a victory: as part of a coalition of groups WIT members lobbied successfully for legislation granting 1 million dollars for an Affordable Housing Trust Fund. During Zero Evictions month WIT will be organizing residents of Louisville’s Sheppard’s Square Housing Projects to protect the residents’ rights as the city of Louisville moves forward with its housing plan.



St. Petersburg, Florida: Following the destruction of tent cities, the closing of shelters, and several murders of homeless people, PPEHRC groups organized a contingent to travel in September to the G-20 in Pittsburg, where they met other groups from across the USA and vowed to continue their resistance back at home as part of the Zero Evictions Campaign.

Waveland, Mississippi: Some members of the PPEHRC group WaveWatchers recently won the right to stay in the “cottages” they were granted after Hurricane Katrina, but they must continue the fight to save others that are being forced out of the city to make room for “development” along the coast. They are organizing for a Zero Evictions policy to replace selective concessions.

The Mississippi Delta: The people of this extremely poor region have been neglected by federal and state government for many decades while their lands, homes, and groundwaters have suffered environmental degradation and people have been forced from their homes. Martin Luther King chose the region as the beginning point of his planned 1968 Poor People’s March to Washington, DC—a march he did not live to see but which PPEHRC has pledged to complete. During October, residents of the area will be preparing to host national PPEHRC planning meetings for its 2010 march from the Delta to the US Social Forum. The human right to housing will be a particular focus of the march.

Detroit, Michigan: In the midst of the global crisis, Detroit is the “eye of the storm.” With the highest unemployment rate in the nation and among the highest foreclosure and eviction rates, whole communities are abandoned. With the privatization of public utilities, thousands more are being forced from their homes because they cannot afford to pay their water bills. During October, the Michigan Welfare Rights Union will have a series of protests along with their meetings to prepare for their hosting of the June 2010 US Social Forum.

San Jose, California: CHAM Deliverance Ministry—the Community Homeless Alliance Ministry--has been organizing the homeless and their allies to fight for housing in Silicon Valley since 1990. Their members have marched, demonstrated, studied, conducted classes and workshops, led economic human rights trainings, organized the homeless to testify, done housing takeovers, led civil disobedience, participated in coalitions, built alliances with unions and health care advocates, and led religious services. Their actions have been responsible for the construction of several hundred extremely low-income housing units in the San Jose area, but there are many more needed to meet the growing need. They will continue to carry the message of housing justice through the streets of San Jose during Zero Evictions month.



Minneapolis, Minnesota: The struggle of "The Minnesota Five" has captured national and international attention as five residents facing foreclosure and eviction have vowed to stay in their homes with the help of neighbors and other supporters from Minnesota PPEHRC and other allies. Typifying the collective determination to save their homes is the resistance of Rosemary Williams: Moments after the Sheriff evicted Mrs. Williams from the family home in which she raised her children, organized neighbors entered the home from the rear and took it back.

The plight and fight of the Minnesota Five is documented in a short video available here:

www.Youtube.com/watch?v=zQeNyVjHuvQ Beginning with a map of the hundreds of homes being foreclosed by "bailout banks" in one part of the city, the video then presents interviews of the Minnesota Five, most of whom are employed and all of whom face court-ordered eviction.

On Zero Eviction Day, the Minnesota Five will lead the PPEHRC initiatives by travelling to Washington, DC to demand a moratorium on evictions and congressional action to bail out the people, not the banks. A press conference at the National Press Club will be followed by meetings with members of congress and a direct action taken on behalf of the millions across the USA who have been evicted or who are imminently facing eviction.



Rosemary Williams of Minnesota PPEHRC with supporters from Critical Mass Action in front of the home she refused to leave after the court ordered the sheriff to evict her.

Philadelphia and York, Pennsylvania: Deindustrialized in the 1970s and 1980s, the once thriving Philadelphia community of Kensington had become the poorest neighborhood in Philadelphia and among the poorest in the nation. Residents lived in crumbling housing—usually all they could afford in this historic city--surrounded by abandoned factories and businesses. The Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU) was organized by five “welfare mothers” in Philadelphia in the early 1990’s and, in 1998, formed the national PPEHRC and a statewide organization, Pennsylvania PPEHRC. Internationally known for its housing takeovers and marches to claim the right to housing, KWRU will be marching once again in October to claim that right.



The center of gravity for the struggle at this time is a trailer park in York, Pennsylvania, 100 miles west of Philadelphia, where 100 residents of a trailer park are being evicted to make room for city-backed “development.” The trailers, mostly occupied for many years by elderly residents, were built in the 1960s and are too fragile to be moved. With no place to go, the residents face eviction and no options. The fight to save these homes will be the focus of actions taken during October’s observance of the Zero Evictions campaign.




Chattanooga, Tennessee: On October 2nd hundreds of homeless will be joined by university students, religious leaders, social workers, and others in a march through the city. The marchers will demonstrate in front of banks and government buildings to demand a moratorium on foreclosures. They will also demand and an end to the city's destruction of tent cities in this community that has no public shelters for its hundreds of homeless people, the majority of whom are children. The march has been organized by the PPEHRC group, CHANGER (Chattanoogans and North Georgians for Economic Rights); it is CHANGER's formal observance of the Zero Evictions Campaign.

Nearby North Georgia is the home of the nation's carpet and flooring industry. With corporate offices in Dalton, GA, dozens of factories until recently paid bonuses to Mexicans to recruit their relatives to work in the carpet mills. Many of them were undocumented, but employed by mill owners eager for their disciplined and tireless labor. With the collapse of the US economy, anti-immigrant age has been fueled by those factory owners and their friends in government. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of laid-off immigrant workers are now living in the woods around Dalton. Denied access to health care, jobs, housing programs, and even many food programs, these so-called "illegal" immigrants cannot march to claim their universal human rights, but their allies in CHANGER will be marching to claim economic human rights for all.

Chattanoogans and North Georgians for Economic Human Rights (CHANGER) presents
Poor People's March on Chattanooga

Join us on October 2nd as we march through downtown Chattanooga in the fight for our rights. We will gather at UTC on the corner of McCallie Ave. and University St. at 5:00 pm.



If you believe that EVERYONE deserves healthcare, affordable housing, and a living wage, we ask you to take a stand with us!

To learn more, visit www.chattanoogachanger.org