

Sanitation workers demand rights

By Richard Becker

In November 2011, shortly after beginning a new career as a labor organizer with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), I received a call from an employee of the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government. He wanted me to meet with some employees in the Division of Waste Management. He said there would be about a half a dozen individuals who wanted to ask me some questions about organizing and what it would mean for them. So I packed up my things, brought a few union cards and one sign-in sheet and made for the meeting place.

When I arrived I realized I had come gravely unprepared. There weren't just a handful of workers—there were close to one hundred of them packing our small meeting room. They kept me busy for the next two hours with a whirlwind of questions, comments, concerns, and calls to action. Workers poked and prodded each other to speak up, speak out, and get involved. They shouted out ideas and suggestions, and signed up to help organize. Leaving the meeting that day I felt flushed, exhilarated and, for the first time in months, like there was

a real and tangible purpose to the work I was doing.

As it turns out, I had walked into a movement already set in motion. In the spring of 2011, there was a dust-up in Waste Management over comments made by a contractor hired by the city to train employees on a new computer system for the garbage trucks. The contractor commented at a city council committee that the workers he trained were "hostile" one-on-one, but in smaller groups "they're puppy dogs." He went on to describe the employees as "illiterate." Ultimately, the city was compelled to apologize when a number of offended Waste Management employees packed the city council chambers to express their offense and concerns.

Nearly a year after the city's apology, and a mere five months after my first under-prepared meeting with them, the workers of Lexington's Waste Management Division made their voices heard: on April 4, 2012, the anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., employees of the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government's Division of Waste Management filed petition cards with the city seeking a

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Boots on the ground Our man in Amsterdam helps bring The Coup to Holland

By Michael Marchman

When I got an email from a friend and fellow activist a few weeks ago asking if I was interested in helping to arrange a show in Amsterdam for the Oakland-based revolutionary hip-hop band, The Coup, I nearly choked on my bitterballen.

I've been listening to The Coup for well over a decade. They've basically provided the soundtrack for my own political activism over the past ten years. Not only am I a big fan of the group, I've followed and admired Boots Riley's, the front man's, work as an organizer and agitator for a long time.

Riley is a virulent critic of capitalism, corporate power, and racism. Both his music and his activism reflect a long-standing commitment to radical social and economic change. In addition to leading The Coup, he is also in a band with Tom Morello (of Audioslave and Rage Against the Machine) called the Street Sweeper Social Club, which, as Morello puts it, produces "revolutionary party jams." He has collaborated with rappers E-40, Tupac Shakur and Dead Prez among others. On the political front, he's been involved with the Progressive Labor Party, the International Committee Against Racism, CopWatch, the Womens' Economic Agenda Project, and the International Campaign to Free Geronimo Pratt. He's taught courses on persuasive lyric writing at the School of Social Justice and Community Development in Oakland, has been a guest on the independent news program *Democracy Now!*, and joined Morello, Billy Bragg, Steve Earle, Naomi Klein and others in the "Tell Us The Truth

Tour" to challenge corporate globalization and media consolidation. You *might* say the man's got some cred.

The Coup, as it turned out, was playing a festival in another part of the Netherlands and was looking for a place to perform that night in Amsterdam. In addition to wanting to do a show, Boots was willing to give a public talk on his involvement in the Occupy movement and the Oakland General Strike last November.

As someone interested in progressive political and economic change and as a participant in Occupy Amsterdam, I knew that somehow I had to help make this happen, so I convinced friends to help me. Unfortunately, I didn't know the first fucking thing about organizing a concert (especially on short notice in the Netherlands) but I was able to talk a local student-run club into hosting the show and arranged for a progressive activist institute where I volunteer to host a public talk by Boots beforehand. A few activist friends helped work out the logistics, print and hang posters around town, and spread the word through social media.

Oakland General Strike

Boots' talk before the show on Occupy and the Oakland General Strike was well received. He discussed how Occupy had transformed people's attitudes about protest and the potential for revolutionary change in the US. "The Occupy movement," he said, "shows that many of us have underestimated the working class in the US by looking at the [terrible] political and economic situation and deciding that it is the way

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ROCK returns to Lexington Center



Rainbow Smite tries to punch through Black-n-Bluegrass wall. Photo by Jack King.

By Sunny Montgomery

When I first began covering the Rollergirls of Central Kentucky (ROCK) for *NoC*, I'd been bewildered by everything: the skaters whizzing past, pushing and falling, the referees gesturing wildly and the announcers hollering things I could not understand. But by the end of the season, I was an enthusiast. I was so overcome with female empowerment that I cut off all my hair and got a girlfriend.

So I was thrilled on April 7 when ROCK returned to the Lexington Center for their first home bout of the new season to face off against the formidable Black-n-Bluegrass Rollergirls (BBRG) from Northern Kentucky.

I arrived in time to take a seat at the edge of the track and open my notebook before the whistle blew, signaling its start. The Pivots were off, followed by the Blockers. The whistle blew a second time, the Jammers rushed forward and instantly, I flashed back to my first roller derby. Fishnetted legs flailed. Elbow and knee pads clanked against the concrete floors. The crowd gasped and cheered. I could not make my pen write fast enough.

"Ladies and gentleman, the track has been coated in Crisco!" Announcer Bill Widener shouted though it wasn't true. The floor had not been buttered—it had been freshly waxed. The first turn of the track seemed nearly unskateable and the players turned into, as ROCK's Rainbow Smite aptly put it, "Bambi on ice."

During the first half, a jam abruptly ended when a player slipped and tangled her skates in the tape that edged the track. This resulted in a colossal rollergirl pileup and an official timeout while volunteers worked quickly to repair the track. I had never seen anything like that happen. Before the bout was over, it would happen two more times.

The slipperiness of the track, in part, may have benefitted BBRG. The Northern KY girls are known for their slow style of play while ROCK is known for their fast-paced athleticism. I remembered from last season that BBRG is also known to have sweeping victories. They have a considerable size advantage and are able to form walls of rollergirls that ROCK's smaller skaters cannot push past. That night was no different. BBRG won the bout: 172 to 71.

No, it was not an idyllic return home for ROCK, but their positive attitudes could not be curbed. "We've all skated under less than ideal conditions," Rainbow told me afterward. "You grin and bear it." Besides, the season is still brand new. There are plenty more opportunities to immerse yourself in the unpredictable world of the roller derby and let ROCK change your life—or perhaps just provide you, your friends and your family with a fun and alternative way to spend a Saturday night. Either way, it's an experience you won't soon forget.

Support your local rollergirls. ROCK's next bout will take place June 23 at Heritage Hall. Bout begins at 7. Doors open at 6:30.



Our Man and Woman in Amsterdam with entourage and Boots Riley. Photo courtesy IIRE.

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Occupy Art: self-evolution and art

By Clay Wainscott

Humans can evolve at an astounding rate because long ago we gave up physical change in favor of mental redefinition—of ourselves, of the world, catapulting through history in periodic jumps as our conception of ourselves expanded. How we see ourselves in turn determines how we see everything else, and in modern times there are powerful influences competing at this most basic level. Advertisers seem to know how images influence thinking and so do politicians. They want to help us determine who we are around the clock, but it's really up to us. From a seemingly infinite array of information sources and forms of entertainment we choose what to look at online, which designer stores to frequent at the mall, and all that determines who we are and who we're going to be in the future. It's not a new idea but if we understood the process maybe we could take more control of the ship, or at least lean in the desired direction.

We no longer need to be convinced of the connection between the condition of our bodies and our sense of wellbeing. Lifting those weights and pedaling the stationary bike will change the physique; avoiding processed foods will clear the arteries. Whether we act on it or not most would agree that's the case. Even fast food franchises are offering healthy alternatives because so many customers are considering their future selves as well as their grease-loving here and now taste buds. Yet while we

acknowledge the physical side, exercise and diet, we may be less discriminating about the mental side, what we see. The cop shows and athletic competitions, the back-to-back truck commercials, and the patter of talking heads represent empty calories in our visual diet, leaving our mental state flabby and dull. What can the average person do to get in shape, to tighten their thought process and refresh their senses?

Some would say video games sharpen the reflexes, and access to all the information there is on a handheld should broaden the intellect, but maybe it's too soon to tell. There is an older technique for altering world view and changing how individuals see themselves, and it's available to anyone. In this age of digital reproduction it's called original art, direct from the hand of the artist.



Encoded in a work of art, beyond the reach of verbal explanations, are intimacies of thought not encountered on billboards or in magazine ads. Original art owned and seen every day enables the nutritional intake of everything else we see, like a daily dose of vitamins which, oddly enough, seem to grow more potent year by year.

Buying art is an investment in the future self, a positive influence on who we'll become as we mature and evolve on our own. It's an effect that's hard to measure but easy to see in others, and they'll tell you about it if you'll listen. Owning art is a way to express your own uniqueness and sense of self, a final lap in the long process of evolution.

Annual Peace fair May 19 at BCTC's Cooper campus

By Rebecca Claire Glasscock

"It is a remarkable paradox that, at the pinnacle of human material and technical achievement, we find ourselves anxiety-ridden, prone to depression, worried about how others see us, unsure of our friendships, driven to consume and with little or no community life." So opens *The Spirit Level* by Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson. The book's authors, two public health experts, make the case that equitable societies are better societies. The benefits extend from physical and mental health to reduced violence, stronger communities and better outcomes for our youth.

Yet, in the U.S. over the last 35 years, we have been going in the opposite direction—toward greater and greater inequity. The gap between the super-rich and everyone else is astounding as is the power of corporations to push an agenda that benefits the elite. As we grapple with these economic and social issues, we are also speeding into a future of climate chaos and the end of the era of cheap fossil fuels.

Although the response is certainly understandable, being in denial does not help. We, our children, our communities, our world will be much better served if we grit our teeth, look problems square in the face, and energize ourselves to work here in Lexington and the Bluegrass to build a future that is decent for everyone. We don't have to start from scratch—we have a lot of great models.

Berea is one of our country's Transition Towns, a movement aimed at transitioning, without great disruption, from fossil fuel dependency to renewable energy, local production, community connections, and conservation. In Lexington, fair trade is increasingly understood and supported as an important way to protect workers around the world. We have a strong local foods movement of farmers markets,

community and school gardens, and CSAs. Music, film, art, and poetry add to the spirit of our town. All of these things help bring us together and strengthen our community.

Lexington's festivals also serve this purpose. One of the festivals coming up this month, on the Saturday after Mother's Day, is the seventh annual Peace & Global Citizenship Fair, hosted by a student organization at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. It'll be held on the Cooper Campus of BCTC (on the north side of Commonwealth Stadium) from 11:30 until 6:00 on May 19. This year's theme is "an embrace of local and global communities and cultures." The festival is eclectic, with a range of activities focused on enjoying and learning about global cultures, social justice, peace, ecological sustainability, skills-building for resilience, art, music, and—of course—food.

Local food, provided by Marksbury Farm Market, will be available. International food will be provided by Fritanga. Local music, including OGrass and local legends Lost Dog, will be on tap along with international music, including Cheryl Pan and the Chinese dancers, and Cuban musicians Yoisel y Legna. The event is free and everyone is welcome. For more specifics on the day's schedule, go to www.peace-2day.org. The hope is that this annual festival helps energize and provide more tools for building a future of equity and peace.

As for what that peace would look like, a 10-year old in England says it well. "Peace is really the playing and laughter of children, the babble of people saying freely what they think, and the scribble of pens, writing what the writers want to say. It is the music of people singing and dancing, people who have food, homes and love. It is people living without fear or lies." Please join us May 19.

Karen, 359 North MLK Boulevard



KAREN / 359 NORTH MARTIN LUTHER KING

6.25.10 / 11:44 AM / 87° F

Karen's family collected this couch two years earlier from outside another apartment on North Martin Luther King Boulevard. They prayed that it would have no bugs in it. It didn't, but it quickly got infested by fleas from their dogs. They put it on the curb when they got a newer and smaller couch, after this one got shredded by the dogs.

Image and text by Kurt Gobde and Kremena Todorova, Discarded project.

“Environmental and highway laws ensure that street conversion in Lexington will not happen just because some Master Plan calls for it.”

MAY 2012

The sunken corridor Boonesborough to Valley View



The Brooklyn. Photo by Troy Lyle.

By Wesley Houp

“Curiosity is natural to the soul of man, and interesting objects have a powerful influence on our affections.”

—Daniel Boone

On a sunny, 35-degree afternoon in March, we haul our boats down I-75, cross the river at Clay’s Ferry, hang a left on U.S. 627, and make our winding descent to Boonesborough and lock 10. Our objective: reconnoiter the watershed below Boone’s famous fort, make note of all curiosities, and emerge from the river valley approximately 20 miles downstream at Valley View in two days’ time. It’s my inaugural voyage with this particular coterie of slack-water venturists, and I find myself in the odd rank of newbie *and* Kentucky River native (river expert by association) simultaneously.

Honestly, I’ve known everyone in the group for at least a decade, and have paddled the river with at least two of them (Troy and Lyle) on numerous occasions in what now seem ancient incarnations. In July of ’95, Troy and I undertook a week-long river-womp from Beattyville to High Bridge, and we, along with Lyle, paddled the lock 7 pool and Dix River tailwaters so often that our wakes seemed permanent. But that was then—the salad days of my tenure

living on the river, ’93 to ’98. We were young, boundless, and the river was ours to discover, conquer, and score with our brands. Today, however, we’re middle-aged, a bit less boundless; the river is ours to rediscover, but we’re more content to float, pass through, leave the world as we find it. Add to the mix, Danny, paddlemaster responsible for this prop-less assemblage, and Gary, even-keeled, soft-spoken—the only one of us who seems capable of acting-his-age-with-any-regularity-but-not-really—and the flotilla is complete.

Once off the ramp, riverwind trumps any warmth the noonday sun might provide, gathering up cold in the shadowy bend near the Kentucky Stone Company quarry and delivering it headfirst so that the blood circulating inside our faces congeals in our cheeks. Past this bend and Memorial Bridge, though, we hit a half-mile of tranquil air and water flanking Boonesborough Camping Ground and Marina, where a flock of resident Canada geese enjoy what appears to be semi-permanent refuge, lured in, no doubt, by the convenience of ever-treating and semi-permanent campers. Curiously, both species seem to have lost their bearings—not to mention all sense of real adventure and nominal position in the gristmill of life.

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Navigating through two-way streets... ...and their environmental costs

By David Shattuck

In my three previous columns, I demonstrated that converting Lexington’s one-way streets to two-way traffic would result in unacceptable peak-hour traffic congestion; this congestion would be expected, in turn, to increase air pollution levels between 10-13%. Recall, too, that Lexington already has the worst carbon footprint of 100 cities surveyed by the Brookings Institute in 2008. In this column I explore some of the legal implications these facts raise.

As the 2007 Lexington Traffic Study explains, Main and Vine Streets (and also portions of some of the other downtown one-way streets) are part of the state highway system; accordingly, they cannot be converted unless the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) approves the proposal. KYTC, in turn, is limited by federal environmental and highway laws in what it may approve. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) mandates that planners evaluate potential environmental consequences before implementing proposals that will involve significant federal funding or involvement. The first step in the NEPA process is an Environmental Assessment (EA). If the EA determines that the proposed action “will not have a significant effect on the human environment”

then KYTC may issue what is known as a FONSI (no relation to the Henry Winkler character from *Happy Days*.)

FONSI is an acronym for “Finding of No Significant Impact.” On the other hand, if the EA concludes that the proposed action would have any significant environmental impact, then the law requires that a full-blown Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be prepared prior to commencement of the project. Because an EIS takes years to complete, planners always strive to obtain a FONSI.

An agency determination that a project may proceed on the basis of a FONSI rather than an EIS may be challenged in federal court. Such challenges have succeeded in numerous cases, and would likely succeed in this case in the event LFUCG attempts to short-circuit the EIS process. Here’s why.

Section 128(a) of the Federal-Aid Highway Act governs any “Federal-aid highway project involving the bypassing of, or going through, any city” and requires LFUCG to certify that it “has considered the economic and social effects of [the project], its impact on the environment, and its consistency with the goals and objectives of such urban planning as has been promulgated by the community.” Section 128(a) requires that planners give “meaningful”

BUILD’s persistence Nehemiah Action Assembly update

NoC News

Over 1,500 people arrived at NorthEast Christian Church on the windy Monday evening of April 23 to call for the amelioration of several social justice issues in Lexington. On the docket: predatory payday lending, the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF), and employment barriers for ex-offenders.

The large gathering was BUILD’s (Building a United Interfaith Lexington through Direct Action) yearly Nehemiah Action, which is the culmination of a year-long process that includes listening sessions on community problems, research on solutions and best practices, and engagement with those who hold the power to create systemic change in Lexington, i.e. public officials.

Payday lending

In its research, BUILD found that payday loans can carry an APR of up to 391 percent, making it usury of Biblical proportions. The group has joined with a coalition of 60 organizations across the state to advocate for legislation capping the APR for payday loans at 36 percent—the rate Congress set for military personnel who were being crippled by predatory payday lending.

Although a bill has been filed in the Kentucky House of Representatives, it has not gained momentum. Embracing its reputation for being tenacious, if not downright obstinate, in the face of political feet-dragging, BUILD committed to redoubling its efforts for policy change in Frankfort next legislative year.

The AHTF

The next issue on the agenda, the AHTF, was proof positive of BUILD’s

persistence. The organization began working on justice issues regarding housing as far back as 2007. In 2008 BUILD, with other organizations, proposed an AHTF to rectify some of the housing inequities in Lexington.

At BUILD’s request, in spring 2008 then-Mayor Newberry agreed to put together a taskforce on an AHTF. The commission, quick on its feet, issued a report by September 2008.

As its yardstick, the AHTF Commission defined affordable housing as “housing that requires families and individuals to pay no more than thirty percent (30%) of their income for housing and housing related costs.”

Of the rental households in Fayette County, more than 45% currently pay more than one-third of their gross household income on rent. This means that these households are not affordably housed. Worse yet, 18% of renter households pay more than half of their income for housing, leaving these neighbors in danger of becoming homeless, according to the Central Kentucky Homelessness and Housing Initiative.

At a March 2011 council meeting, Commonwealth Economics, a firm hired by the Council to study the fiscal, economic, and social impact of an AHTF in Lexington, presented their study on the issue.

“Housing trust funds are dedicated sources of revenue to help low- and moderate-income people achieve affordable housing,” Commonwealth Economics writes in its report.

“In most cases, a government agency—usually an existing housing agency—administers the housing trust fund and awards grants and loans to local governments, non-profit developers, for-profit developers, and,

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Castlewood Neighborhood Association

Spring Potluck
Saturday, June 9
Loudoun House courtyard

Watch the Castlewood Neighborhood Association Facebook group for more details.

consideration to citizen concerns expressed at a public hearing on the proposal. The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals described the statute’s purpose in a 1970 decision: “[T]hat highway planners be directly and publicly confronted with opposing views, to ensure that the planners take close account of the objectives and desires of individual citizens affected by the proposed project during the planning process.”

Accordingly, environmental and highway laws ensure that street conversion in Lexington will not happen just because some Master Plan calls for it. Rather, countless questions must be answered. These might include

- How many more vehicles will now be using New Circle, the Interstate, and other routes and what are the congestion, pollution and noise implications?
- How many more minutes will cars sit idling during peak hours and downtown events and how much air and noise pollution is generated thereby?
- How many autos will re-route to the residential neighborhoods that surround downtown?

In addition, these laws will require planners to study in detail impacts on

auto and pedestrian accidents, as hard data from other cities shows that street conversion negatively impacts both. Restricted emergency vehicle access must also be addressed.

The \$425,000 traffic study LFUCG is preparing to undertake acknowledges these truths, but the government has not provided any meaningful public consideration of them. Instead, the LFUCG has already prejudged the matter. The Request for Proposals (RFP) indicates the study will consist of five components. One of these states that “an assessment of environmental, environmental archeology and other services, air quality, safety, cultural and historical impacts that need to be addressed *in order to implement* two-way conversion/operation should be identified” (emphasis mine).

The RFP violates the environmental and highway laws referenced above because it does not require planners to undertake these inquiries prior to deciding whether a project should go forward. Indeed, LFUCG has already decided that conversion will go forward: the Master Plan calls for it and the Planning Commission has expressly adopted that provision of the Plan. Remarkably, the RFP does not ask whether the

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“Since the city negotiates with unions for other city worker classifications, it should recognize all city workers’ rights to union representation.”

MAY 2012

Summer Classics back at KY Theater

Charade opens series on May 30

By Barbara Goldman

Entering the 10th season of its Summer Classics Movie Series, the Kentucky Theater is eager to get started on Wednesday, May 30, with Cary Grant and Audrey Hepburn gracing the screen together in *Charade*.

“Our audience is very diverse. The movies bring people back to the theater that used to come here when they were children, teenagers, or university students,” says Kentucky Theater General Manager Fred Mills. “We are very very lucky to have it here.

Mills, who has been with the theater since 1963, credits film series booker Larry Thomas with helping to once again make this film series a huge success.

“The booker has a lot of tough issues to overcome when finding us films. We seek out 35mm prints that are available

and still in release,” says Mills. “Once we find those prints available the question is then raised as to what kind of condition the film is in.”

In addition, the theater receives film request from patrons throughout the year.

“People ask and offer suggestions, give us hand written notes at the ticket stand, email us. They send us hundreds of suggestions, all of which we suggest to the booker.”

The 2012 season

This season is getting kicked off in usual fashion with a rarely seen and rare studio print.

“*Charade* is one of the best ‘Hitchcock non Hitchcock’ films there is,” says Mills about the film. After finishing this film, Cary Grant was quoted as saying, “All I want for Christmas is

to make another movie with Audrey Hepburn.”

Mills is excited to bring several films back to the series after they received such a response from the public.

“We showed *The Wizard of Oz* several years ago. It’s always a huge favorite. We are also very excited to be bringing back *Casablanca* for its 70th anniversary. A lot of folks have a very strong affection for the movie. It’s one of my favorites. It’s a feel-good movie and it’s always entertaining.”

This year’s movie variety will certainly offer something for everyone. Movies range from Woody Allen’s Oscar winning *Annie Hall*, to *Mary Poppins*, *The White Heat*, *Pillow Talk*, and *It’s a Mad Mad Mad Mad World*.

Classic film fans who don’t see their favorite flick listed need not be disappointed. For the second year in a row,

the folks at Special Media (located at 371 South Limestone) will help sponsor additional Wednesday movie nights, the selections for which are still to be decided.

“Last year the Special Media stepped up and helped the series continue longer. It was a huge success. It exceeded expectations,” says Mills. “It really tapped into the University community and people who enjoy foreign films. This year instead of just sponsoring three, they wanted to do four!”

\$5 per seat for all shows. Most films show twice on Wednesday, at 1:30 p.m. and 7:15 p.m., with the exception of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, which will also play at 4 p.m. due to the Fourth of July Holiday. For more information on the series, including the schedule, go to www.kentuckytheatre.com



Sanitation (cont.)

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union election. Forty-four years earlier, in April of 1968, Dr. King traveled to Memphis to stand with striking sanitation workers who were attempting to form a union through the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. While standing up for these mistreated and underpaid workers Dr. King was tragically gunned down.

Joining Lexington’s sanitation workers on this historic day was Mr. Baxter Leach, one of the Memphis sanitation workers who organized his fellow workers, agitated for a union, and marched in the streets with Dr. King in 1968. Although he felt the sting of pepper spray and the blast of fire hoses in the streets of Memphis, Leach also felt the warmth of worker solidarity and the relief of victory when the city finally relented, less than two weeks after King’s assassination, and recognized AFSCME Local 1733. Leach agreed to join Lexington’s sanitation workers in their struggle because since his retirement, he has dedicated himself to furthering the cause of the labor movement across the country. He recognized the historic nature of the occasion and the very real concerns of these workers.

What they want: representation and respect

Waste Management employees work primarily out of one site, on Byrd Thurman Drive off Old Frankfort Pike.

Navigating (cont.)

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environmental impacts of street conversion are acceptable; instead it asks “what needs to be addressed in order to implement street conversion.”

Any doubts about LFUCG’s intentions are removed by the very next line which follows in the RFP: “identify potential environmental ‘red flags’ that may be anticipated in the implementation phases of the conversions.” Here again, LFUCG has already concluded that the conversion proposal itself need not be supported by an Environmental Assessment. LFUCG has confined its analysis of the environmental impacts to the “implementation phase” of a project. It is more interested in the barriers standing in the way of street conversion than in whether the environmental impacts outweigh the benefits it hopes to obtain in the first place.

Santec (formerly Entran, which also conducted the 2000 and 2007 traffic studies) has been awarded the contract for the current traffic study (although the contract has yet to be executed at the time of this writing, mid-April). In its 2007 study, Entran has already concluded that “higher vehicle emission

As such, they are largely divorced from the decision-making that takes place at the government center on Main Street. Although they are one of the largest divisions of government, they are the employees most distant from where the conversations and decisions about how best to run the government are made. They want a voice in the government they serve.

This entails not only a physical bridging of the distance between them and city management—through face-to-face discussions of benefits and working conditions, for example—but also a symbolic one: they want input into the decision-making process, and a city administration more fully aware of the work they do every day.

On a fundamental level, then, they seek dignity, respect and fairness. Since the city negotiates with unions for other city worker classifications, they argue, it should recognize all city workers’ rights to union representation. As one worker expressed to me: “We’ve been told for years by the city that [human resources] would fix everything right up. Well, it’s just not working. Maybe with a union, we can *make* them listen up.”

The ball is in the city’s court. The sanitation workers are more optimistic about their prospects than they’ve been in years. They are counting on their government to do the right thing, to recognize their right to form a union.

For more information on how to support the recognition campaign of Lexington’s city employees, write to the author at rbecker@afscmecn62.org.

levels (air pollution) can be expected as a result of the increased congestion” conversion would necessitate. Indeed, \$19,000 of the \$100,000 spent on that study came from a federal Air Quality planning grant.

Remarkably, Santec’s bid—it’s response for the RFP—gives short shrift to the environmental issues. Its proposal goes on for three entire pages describing the efforts it will undertake to convince Lexingtonians that conversion will work and be worth the effort. Yet the bid devotes *just a single paragraph* to all of the environmental issues, one which essentially parrots the RFP’s demand “to identify potential environmental red flags.”

Well, I’ve just identified one actual, significant environmental red flag: unless the city believes that two-way downtown streets will have no environmental impact, NEPA requires that a full-blown EIS be prepared before deciding whether conversion should in fact be implemented. By not performing a public study of the environmental impacts of slower-moving downtown auto traffic, LFUCG is inviting a court challenge that it has acted in violation of NEPA.

BUILD (cont.)

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in some cases, individuals, for a variety of low- and moderate-income housing activities.”

The study found that a local AHTF would, on average, produce approximately 470 housing opportunities each year, along with 150 new construction jobs and 320 rehabilitation projects.

The research also found that “more than 363 new jobs will be directly and indirectly supported by trust fund investment.” Additionally, “more than \$43.3 million of direct, indirect and induced economic activity will be generated from trust fund investment.”

After almost five years, the volleying of the AHTF question between various Council committees, and much “studying,” Council is still generally squeamish about standing for affordable housing in Lexington. The several councilmembers who have committed to this form of justice, and who affirmed that stance at the Nehemiah Action, were Chris Ford (District 1), Tom Blues (District 2), and Steve Kay (At-Large). If your councilmember is not in that list, you’re encouraged to call their office and press for the importance of an AHTF. Tell your councilmember: “Stop shuffling the AHTF.”

Employment and ex-offenders

BUILD began attending to the issue of re-entry of ex-offenders in December 2010. In its research, the organization found that 20,000 people in Lexington have a criminal background and that even persons with misdemeanors have problems finding employment.

BUILD also found that if ex-offenders do not find employment and are not able to regain footing in their lives, they are more likely to commit another offense. In fact, within 90 days of release, they are 500 times more likely meet the law again. High

recidivism threatens to create a permanent underclass in our city.

In the organization’s view, the first step toward removing barriers for ex-offenders is “to review city jobs that do not require background checks by law to determine which of those positions should require background checks because they are sensitive and which positions should not require background checks. Then, adjust city policy to eliminate background checks on the jobs they determine do not require them.”

Because the mayor backed away from the issue last year at the Nehemiah Action, this year BUILD proposed baby steps for the mayor’s administration.

First, they asked Mayor Gray if he would attend a workshop organized by BUILD on the issue.

Second, they asked Mayor Gray to engage members of his administration and major local employers to attend the workshop.

Third, they asked Mayor Gray to meet with BUILD again to “develop strategies focused on removing employment barriers for ex-offenders.”

The mayor’s answer: “Y-E-S.”

The assembly warmly accepted the mayor’s acquiescence, but it’s hard to see if it was a real victory. Certainly, it was better PR for the mayor after last year’s awkwardness. BUILD knows its own mind, and its mind is inclined toward action, so while “educating” the mayor on the issue may be an action, it’s a relatively small one that plays to the mayor’s inclination toward “studying.” With the mayor, City Council seems perennially ready to study this or that issue (and spend lots of money doing it), but much slower to take a concrete stand on issues that effect the lives of Lexingtonians hit hard by poverty and systemic disenfranchisement.

Nonetheless, the Nehemiah Action affirmed that solidarity with the poor and downtrodden can be a place of power and a position from which to do justice.

The Region

MAY 2012

Hendryx stretches mind

Health expert: coal regions produce high cancer rates

By John Hennen

In science, it is seen as a virtue to hold your views tentatively, rather than with certainty, and to express them with the requisite caveats and without emotion. It is also seen as admirable to change your mind, based upon the weight of new evidence.

—Chris Mooney, *The Republican Brain*

On April 10 about seventy-five students, faculty, and regional visitors gathered on the campus of Morehead State University for a presentation by one of the Appalachian region's foremost experts on community health, Dr. Michael Hendryx. In terms of structure and style, the lecture and subsequent discussion were academic, measured, non-confrontational, and dignified. In terms of content, and potential long-term implications for the coal industry's historic stranglehold on Eastern Kentucky, Hendryx's research might be revolutionary. I hope so.

Michael Hendryx is an associate professor of community medicine and directs the Rural Health Research Center at West Virginia University. A PhD in Psychology (Northwestern, 1986), he arrived at WVU about five years ago after working on health policy issues at Washington State University. Perhaps inevitably, given the influence of the West Virginia coal industry on public policy and the state's political economy, not to mention the longstanding debates around the potential health effects of coal, Hendryx began to educate himself about the industry's most radically destructive practice, Mountaintop Removal mining (MTR).

As he recounted in a 2011 interview with Jeff Young of Public Radio's

"Living on Earth," Hendryx began to question the public health consequences of Mountaintop Removal coal mining during a visit to Kayford Mountain, West Virginia, where legendary West Virginia environmental justice activist Larry Gibson introduced him to the physical and cultural devastation unleashed by MTR. "I saw huge trucks dumping rocks; I could feel the dust in my throat. It became a personal encounter. I could understand it."

Academic work

Many who witness the awesome devastation by MTR respond with grassroots mobilization—lobbying, demonstrating, researching, petitioning, organizing, writing, singing—in order to wean Appalachian coal country off the cultural addiction to carbon and towards healthy renewable energy. These dedicated individuals bring their particular talents to the perpetual struggle for justice in the coal fields. Dr. Hendryx has responded to the systemic dilemmas generated by coal extraction with a rigorous research program whose findings strongly suggest that coal makes people sick. Really, really sick.

A study published by Hendryx and three colleagues in *Environmental Research*, for example, indicates a link between maternal exposure to mining's toxic dust and contaminated water and high rates of birth defects in their children. Moreover, at least nineteen of the chemicals used in processing coal are carcinogens, and others are known to contribute to lung and heart damage. As reported in *Mother Jones* on June 22, 2011, Hendryx remarked that the "study 'offers one of the first indications that health problems are disproportionately concentrated' in mining areas . . ."

Speaking before the Kentucky House Committee on Health and Welfare in March of 2010, Hendryx testified that his research shows that rates of chronic heart, lung and renal failure mortality are higher in coal-producing areas "than in the rest of Appalachia or the nation, even after the rates have been adjusted for other factors such as smoking, age and education. . . . We have some evidence that the effects become stronger as the level of mining increases."

Hendryx's West Virginia research relies heavily on extensive household surveys collected in communities in close proximity to MTR; in communities where other forms of coal mining are practiced; and in non-coal producing communities. With breathtaking consistency (that's not hyperbole—it's an accurate description of audience reaction), the sophisticated statistical methodologies his studies employ reveal ascending rates of chronic lung and heart disease, cancers, and birth defects depending on the type of mining to which residents are exposed. Rates are lowest in non-coal regions, higher in "other" coal regions, and highest in MTR communities. No variation.

As a scientist, Hendryx is careful not to overstate the correlations he has found. Nor does he make sweeping, spectacular claims. At his Morehead visit, he stressed that he could not claim that the increased cancer rates are specifically attributable to households getting exposed to the toxic environment produced by MTR

and other mining. But, he points out, they have to be caused by something.

If scientists were to test, develop and generally take-up Hendryx's results, they could lead to revolutionary developments in public health policy, economic development strategies, and even politics as usual in Kentucky and West Virginia. To cite just one problem area for King Coal, the industry claims that coal contributes \$80 billion annually to positive economic activity in the U. S. It's a big number, but it begins to shrivel alongside projections that the coal's health costs range from \$170-\$350 billion (\$500 billion, according to a Harvard study), annually. In other words, not only is the mining process dangerous to all living things, it's now a quantifiably bad deal in purely "rational" terms.

The folks gathered at Morehead on the evening of April 10 experienced the noblest feature of enlightened education—the stretching of our minds.

Dr. Hendryx has recently begun collecting surveys in Rowan, Elliott, and Floyd counties in Kentucky in order to expand his study. For more on the March 2010 testimony before the Kentucky House Committee on Health and Welfare, see "Hearing exposes coal's multi-billion dollar public health cost," KFTC.org, April 26, 2010.

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(Owsley and
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Salubrious



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END.

MAY 2012

Sunken corridor (cont.)

continued from page 3

The array of RVs on the Clark County bank seems anathema to Boone’s reenacted fort just up river on the Madison County side. Boone forged Wilderness Road in 1775 through dense woodland, endless cane-brake and rolling savannah with guns, axes and ploughs and opened the west. RVer’s return to the spot, 2011, via U.S. 627, to reclaim some wildness all but lost to many Americans, to “rough it”—or at least stare out at the river and cliffs through mildewed camper windows and swirling carboniferous haze of Kingsford briquets.

Another mile downstream the river bends sharply southwest and begins a 37-mile course-change through a girdle of Ordovician palisades. At the southern-most tip of what is now Jessamine County, it recovers a north-westerly meander to the Ohio. Near the beginning and end of this redirection, the river intersects the shallow but prominent Kentucky River Fault Zone, plainly visible at Clay’s Ferry and farther down at Camp Nelson. The “Jessamine Dome” forms the highest point along the geological formation known as the Cincinnati Arch, a Pliocene upheaval stretching from Northern Kentucky to south of Nashville, Tennessee, and through this stretch of sheer cliffs, the river crisscrosses the fault-lines no less than nine times—a bird’s nest of subterranean, hairline fractures sutured by a listless, ancient thread of water.

Shipwrecked on Lisletown ledge

Just around the bend, Lower Howard Creek enters the mainstem on the Clark County side near the hamlet of Lisletown. Troy pulls ahead as the bend opens to a long straightaway and soon angles alongside a half-sunken tow—the *Brooklyn*. The old steel-hulled, stern-wheel diesel came into this life in 1929 under the name *Helen H.* and worked the upper-Ohio watershed. In the mid-40s, Captain John Donaldson bought and refurbished the tow and put her to work hauling sand down the Kentucky. He renamed her *Brooklyn* after the site where he often docked below lock 7. But her tenure on the Kentucky was cut short by size and heft; she was too slow to remain a solvent business venture and compete with smaller tows (let alone rail transportation) on the narrow, meandering Kentucky. So he eventually stripped the *Brooklyn* down to decking and hull and docked her below Boonesborough for good.

“You know,” I conjecture, “the problem with the *Brooklyn* is that she was built like a giant fucking anchor. Even in this dilapidated state she’s behemoth. What was it that Thoreau said? ‘If rightly made, a boat would be a sort of amphibious animal, a creature of two elements, related by one half its structure to some swift and shapely fish, and by the other to some strong-winged and graceful bird.’ I realize he didn’t have diesel tows in mind, but still... This boat is half humpback and half B-52.”

The old ghost was sold in the 80s, and the new owners towed her to her current location, below the mouth of Lower Howard, in fleeting hopes she might live again as a floating restaurant or some other profitable curio. During the drought in the late 80s, however, the river-level dropped so low the *Brooklyn* lodged permanently on a sharp ledge, the limestone piercing her aged hull and relegating her once and for all to shipwreck status—not the kind of tourist curiosity the new owners had in mind. But a marvelous curiosity she remains.

As Troy paddles around all sides, gaining just the right angles with his camera, I paddle into her lower deck. It’s clear the hull has been wrenched open; sunlight refracts up through the water column on her starboard, channel-facing side. Two stories overhead, the pilot-house stares blindly upriver, a colossal, rusted eye-socket. The rest of the crew paddle through a bulkhead door into the

lower deck. We float on an illuminated emerald cloud, the water infused with particularly radioactive-green algae that flourishes in cold temperatures. Danny produces deli sandwiches and begins piecing them out, while Gary brandishes a handle of Laphroaig ten-year old. Scotch and Genoa salami offer heat to recharge the body; the shadowy, forlorn hull of the *Brooklyn* counters with bone-chilling cold to refocus the spirit. After a brief inspection of the engine room, we push off. Little over three miles separate us from our bivouac on Boone Creek. Charged by the holy meritage of liquor and lore, though, we make the mouth in a smooth, cold river-hour.

Camp on Boone Creek

Steady traffic on Clay’s Ferry Bridge whines high above us, filling the valley, and from where we idle in the mouth of Boone Creek, the passing trucks and cars sound like a swarm of Jurassic hornets busy at some ominous and strangely stationary task. But long before interstates and highways spoiled this stretch of riverscape, Daniel Boone, then 45, crossed the river and led his and several other families down the



Icicle cliffs on Boone Creek. Photo by Troy Lyle.

Clark County bank, escaping fortress Boonesborough—and the incessant claim disputations of land-grabbing commissioners from Virginia. It was Christmas Day, 1779. They trudged through ice and snow, their destination what would come to be known as Boone’s Station near the confluence of Boone Creek and Baughman Fork.

The creek marks the boundary between Fayette and Clark counties, and soon inside the narrow mouth, palisades rise on the Fayette bank. Barely a quarter mile in, shallow water prohibits any further progress; but the shoal is broad and flat enough to hold our beached crafts. We pitch tents on fine pebble, coated with a layer of frozen river silt. Surrounded to the north by open wood—primarily sugar maple—the rock-face to our south reflects the deepening shadows’ cold back to us, so we busy ourselves with fire.

It’s already past five o’clock, the sun long gone beyond the Fayette palisade, and frost is forming on the shadowy lengths of fallen timber. Behind us on the creek-bank, a flock of wild turkeys disrupts the gathering stillness with cackles suggesting time to haul tail and roost. When our fire finally matures, stars are twinkling through the bare canopy. For dinner, it’s chicken livers, pork chops and rye bread. We linger around the fire deep into the night, passing the Laphroaig, watching our own shadows play upon the nearest trees, and imagining a time, not all that long ago, when such exposure in the wilderness was murderously stupid.

Sugar-making

We awake to a crystalline dream-cape. Lyle’s first up and kicking unburned log-ends back into the ember-core when the rest of us emerge. “Got down to 19 degrees, but we should have sunlight within a few hours,” he says, pausing to rub smoke from his eye. High above on the canopied cliffs,

yellow light floods the bare maples, but creek-side everything is dim with thick frost, including our tents and gear.

“I wonder how many times Boone froze his johnson near this very spot? Thank god for fiber-filled sleeping bags,” Troy interjects with a disgusted look at the thick rime covering his tent.

“Give me deerskin and buffalo hide any day,” Danny replies. “You know, they were naturally water-repellent. I mean, when’s the last time you saw a cold, wet buffalo?”

Troy unpacks a dozen eggs from the food bag, and Gary proffers up a thick slab of bacon. Within minutes, breakfast is crackling in the pan. Danny turns to warm his frozen posterior. Relaxing against the fire, he intones:

“Ah, for some maple syrup. You know boys, when Boone moved here in ’79 it was the coldest winter on record. The settlers in Kentucky referred to it ever after as ‘The Hard Winter.’ So cold, they say, a man’s rifle wouldn’t fire, and on the off chance it did, then it wouldn’t fire again. Wild turkeys froze to the ground and suffocated when their nostrils clogged with ice. But in February of 1780, despite heavy snow and bit-

ter cold, Rebecca Boone ventured out with the other women and children at Boone’s Station and collected sap in the maple groves nearby, not unlike the maple grove flanking our shoal, boiling and refining the sap to syrup and finally to sugar. Unable to forage in the frozen woods, buffalo wandered in close to lick the sap buckets and couldn’t be shoed away.

“Apparently Boone himself was a master sugar-maker. Seems only right, given his skill at making salt, too. He was no farmer, they say, but a true hunter-gatherer. His heart was in the woods, and he preferred to toil there, be it stalking game, surveying creek bottoms, or collecting and reducing maple sap. It was an activity that Daniel and Rebecca enjoyed together in all their wild cohabitations. In 1797, even while Boone was being sued by every Johnny-come-lately over this or that ‘fraudulent’ survey, the couple boiled over 500 pounds of maple sugar. Five-hundred fucking pounds. It takes forty gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup. And for ten gallons of syrup, you might realize eight pounds of maple sugar. To get 500 pounds of sugar, they had to collect 25,000 gallons of sap. Now that’s epic foraging, brothers. Before Europeans arrived, Indians used maple sugar to sweeten an otherwise humble existence. It could also be fermented into mean-ass mead and even distilled into crude white lightning—just the ticket for inducing bottle fever on sub-zero frontier nights.”

Danny pauses for a long pull of Laphroaig. “Plus, psychologically, sugaring signaled a renewal of life, the promise of another spring for beleaguered souls beyond the margin of civilization.” And with that, he turns again, raising his palms in obeisance to the fire spirit.

The rising aroma of bacon, coupled with heady thoughts of maple syrup, triggers spontaneous formation of a silent chow-procession. The clink of fork

and knife subsides just as the sun creeps across our shoal-camp. Within a half hour, our boats are packed; Gary pours coffee dregs across the remaining coals and banks the outer ashes.

Bull Hell to Bill Lail

Back at the mouth, Clay’s Ferry Bar stretches across the Madison County shore, and immediately downstream, the I-75 bridge spans the chasm, its massive supports extending down from concrete undergirds to the Kentucky’s placid surface. Dwarfed in its shadow, the old U.S. 25 Bridge provides a bit more aesthetic stimulation; its iron girders, riveted beams and arching framework remind the languid paddler of a more artful progressive era. Iron bridges like this one were designed to maximize the traveler’s experience of “crossing over.” For the fast, vast majority of present-day motorists, Clay’s Ferry Bridge neuters any and all aesthetic experience of river-crossing: the river is just an afterthought. The sudden, hollow baritone shift of tires spinning off terra firma and on to prefab concrete spans hints to unwary travelers that something monumental has opened up below, but exactly what it is remains all but hidden from view and therefore out of mind. Traffic flows at an unabated breakneck pace. But those few drivers who wind down the bluffs on U.S. 25 see firsthand the ancient river yawning away to the north and angling immediately out of sight to the south. The old route demands patience, and in the time it takes to cross the aged iron structure, Bull Hell Cliff blots out the southern sky, reinforcing one’s insignificance in the steady grind of geologic time.

As our flotilla passes under the array of bridges and sidles up to the fault-line near the base of the cliff, I produce my weathered copy of T. Dionysius Clark’s *The Kentucky*. “Gentleman, according to Clark, this promontory was named by the legendary, quick-tempered abolitionist and hair-triggered dualist, Cassius Clay, who, among other noble endeavors, raised prize-winning bulls just south of here at White Hall. The story goes he had a pure-bred but infernally stubborn bull, wouldn’t mind and wouldn’t corral. Unable to catch the willful beast, Clay, beset with unrighteous anger, drove it over this very cliff where it fell two hundred feet and slammed down...right about...there...” I point to a ledge near the water’s edge in dramatic guesstimation. “Thereafter, when envious neighbors inquired about his pedigreed ruminant, Clay sneered that he’d gone to ‘Bull’s hell on the Kentucky River.’”

At Bull Hell Cliff, the river bends sharply northwest for three miles, passing Elk Lick Run, Lexington’s municipal straws, and another high palisade. Just beyond these cliffs, the current turns south again, and Raven Run enters the flow from Fayette County. Bill Lail Island, the only permanent (and official) landmass *within* the Kentucky’s 255-mile mainstem, forms an oblong break in the current and constricts the channel to the east against Raven Bar. We beach at the head of the island; Danny and Gary linger by the boats, looking back upriver toward Raven Run, while Troy, Lyle and I comb the scraggly trees, stumps, and deadfall for flotsam curiosities. Finding nothing, we return and enjoy a rousing round of rock-skipping.

After paddling and shoal-rummaging, rock-skipping is as natural as breathing. It goes something like this: 1) beach your craft, 2) dismount, 3) consolidate the clutter of beer cans and orange peels, 4) bail bilge-water, 5) stretch, 6) scratch, 7) take a whiz, 8) notice flat, round stones, 9) start skipping them. It spreads like wildfire, and commands bachelor-flock mentality. We soon discover that Troy is top-gun. In all likelihood, he could skip a wet cat. Amid our juvenile pronging, Gary pipes in. “Check out the gaping maw on the cliff.” We follow his line of sight, and there, high above us on the far side, Devil’s Meat House bleeds shadow like a puncture wound to the dark heart of the earth.

Speaking of strikes and occupations

Update on FNV Bondgenoten

By our man in Amsterdam

In the March issue of *NoC*, I wrote about an important struggle happening in the Netherlands. This struggle is centered around a strike by the Dutch cleaners union (FNV Bondgenoten) over declining wages, increased workloads and cuts in benefits. When that column was written, the strike was in its twelfth week and was already the longest strike in the Netherlands since 1933. The cleaners provide janitorial services at universities, train stations, airports, hospitals, and a number of major corporations.

The strike is remarkable not only for its duration, but also for its innovative strategy of solidarity building and militant direct action. The cleaners joined forces with students and faculty upset over cuts to higher education, as well as other public employees facing job losses and wage cuts. In the process they organized two 24-hour occupations of two different universities, which put tremendous pressure on university administrators to demand that the cleaning

companies respect their workers and on the government to reverse austerity measures that are gutting treasured public services and contributing to declining wages. The cleaners' demand for 'respect and a pay raise' as well as their demonstrations of solidarity with other workers and students has generated tremendous public sympathy and provided a much-needed boost of adrenaline to Dutch labor movement.

After 105 days, ten "Marches for Respect," two university occupations, and tireless campaigning, the strike has ended in a major victory not only for the cleaners, but also for the entire Dutch trade union movement and for working people across the Netherlands. The victory includes a 4.85% salary increase, better training, regular assessments of the workload (and rate of work), greater security for temporary workers, and a commitment by the employers to improve sick pay benefits. The cleaners' victory constitutes one of the most significant labor victories in the Netherlands in decades.



Cleaners sit-in at Utrecht University. Photo courtesy www.schoongenoeg.nu.

And how did they succeed? They succeeded through organization, agitation, solidarity, direct action, and a strike that cut significantly into the profits of the employers and contractors that were exploiting them. If working people,

whether in the Netherlands, the US, or anywhere else are going fight back against the class war being waged against them, it is going to require bold, direct forms of action like these. It is time to rediscover the power of the strike.

How do you create a job?

U.S. history, governments and job creation

By Jack Stevenson

Presidential elections in the United States are affected by the economy. We are going to be hearing rival arguments about job creation and economic recovery. Can a government create jobs and engineer recovery from an economic recession? A brief glance at the American experience is revealing.

A little more than a century ago, the common conveyance was a horse drawn carriage. Suddenly, the horseless carriage created great excitement. By 1915, there were 450 companies in the United States trying to produce carriages that would eventually be known as automobiles. Few of those companies survived, but an era was born—and another one died. Harness makers, wagon and buggy producers, and those in the horseshoeing trade found that their jobs had been eliminated by a newfangled contraption that made a lot of noise, scared horses, and didn't run very well. But for every job eliminated by the horseless carriage, several new jobs were created.

Henry Ford standardized parts. With that achievement he could produce automobiles on an assembly line, and the efficiency of the assembly line and standardized repair parts made automobiles affordable for ordinary Americans. Mass production of automobiles generated follow-on employment for people in glass, rubber, coal, steel, road building, oil exploration and refining, gasoline service stations, automobile sales and service dealerships, junkyards, towing, emergency medical service, insurance, chemicals, law, farm machinery, construction equipment, military equipment, trucking, machine tools, the travel and recreation industry, and the automobile facilitated suburban housing utilization and shopping mall development. The automobile was an economic engine. The jobs that were created generated tax revenue that made the United

States Treasury the envy of the world. Automobiles were an exceptionally useful invention, and everybody wanted one.

Today, there is no job generator on the horizon that promises to be equivalent to the automobile. In fact, businesses have moved to eliminate employment. Automation and computerization are reducing the need for employees.

Depressions, stimulus, war and debt

When World War II began, the United States had been suffering from a severe economic depression for more than 10 years. Unemployment was still over 17 percent in 1939, a decade after the infamous stock market crash. During the depression, the Roosevelt Administration engaged in countercyclical deficit spending to stimulate the economy, but it did not generate economic recovery. Robert S. McElvaine, historian and author of *The Great Depression*, writes that "Without the military boom in response to the German war machine, Roosevelt's presidency would probably have been remembered as compassionate and helpful but ineffective in solving the fundamental problems of the Depression."

The war created a gargantuan demand for war materiel: ships, planes, trucks, tanks, artillery, and the thousands of other things that were required to equip and sustain millions of soldiers, sailors, and airmen. Unemployed citizens were recruited to work in the war production plants. The demand was so great that women were welcomed into the factories. During the course of the war, sixteen million Americans served in the armed forces. War production and military service solved the unemployment problem.

The United States government imposed taxes but also borrowed, massively, to fund the war. The massive debt was not a great burden because, after

the war, the U.S. was the only industrial power still standing. The U.S. produced for the entire world and quickly became the world's leading economy. Also, when the war was over, there was strong domestic demand for everything a growing population of young American families needed. A generous GI Bill provided an educated work force.

We cannot duplicate this employment process today, and surely no reasonable person would want to.

On June 19, 2010, the 1100 workers at the Evansville, Indiana, Whirlpool plant lost their \$18 per hour jobs because the company closed the plant and outsourced the jobs to a foreign country. With the approval of the U.S. Government, American corporations have outsourced approximately six million jobs to foreign countries. When that happens, families are devastated. Businesses where those families spent money are diminished, tax revenue declines, and welfare requirements increase. Yet, our capitalist doctrine approves of these adjustments. Corporations exist to maximize profit; they do not exist to govern wisely. While we strive to increase employment, we simultaneously eliminate jobs.

British economist John Maynard Keynes advocated that, during an economic recession, a government should spend more than it collects in tax revenue to stimulate economic recovery and then impose taxes to recover the debt as soon as economic conditions improve. This theory has many adherents. However, we must ask if it is wise to incur a debt when a country already has a staggering debt. Since 1970, 42 years ago, the United States government collected more tax revenue than it spent in only four years, and it spent more than it received in tax revenue in each of the other 38 years. Consequently, our national debt is now more than 15 trillion dollars. We are currently spending almost 40 percent more each year than we collect in tax revenue, and we have not found an equitable way to curb that excess spending. So, currently, government spending (deficit spending) to

stimulate the economy and trigger job growth is not a very practical solution.

Government's role: trust

If a formula existed that a government could apply to engineer a recovery from a serious economic recession, every government on the planet would use it, and economic recessions would be weekend affairs. Obviously, that kind of economic formula doesn't exist. But government does have a necessary role in our economic system. Foremost is creating trust.

We need to be able to trust our police and our judicial systems. We need confidence that the hundreds of government functions that serve us are reliable. Among those many services, none is more important than public education. In a complex technical society, education is vital. We need to know that we can change our government or government officials when necessary. Trustworthy and responsive governments provide a good foundation for economic activity. Federal, state, and local government payrolls provide an important cushion during an economic recession. Those paychecks just keep coming, and without the government paychecks, economic recessions would be much worse.

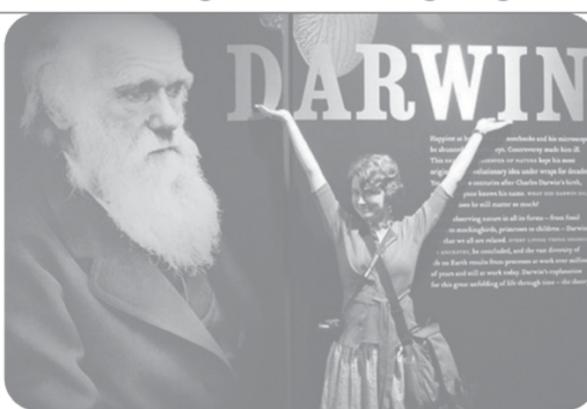
Economics professors Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff surveyed the history of economic crises over several hundred years. They indicate in their book, *This Time is Different*, that it typically requires five years for a country to regain full employment following a severe recession. If that trend holds, employment in the United States will normalize by 2013. But, "this time," it may not happen that quickly. The people who lost their jobs to outsourcing are not going to be recalled. Mortgage housing issues are not resolved. The national debt and our unwillingness to produce tax revenues equal to annual government expenditures limit the government's capability to solve problems.

Regardless of your political party preferences, you would be wise to view political promises of government driven economic prosperity with some skepticism.



Way to go Laura!

An *NoC* congrats on the college degree



A degree Darwin would love:

BA, Centre College (2012), Anthropology and Sociology, with Environmental Studies and International Studies minors

MAY 2012

Technology and emergent social systems

By Jason Souders

The article titled “F**k U-Scan” (April, 2012) was an insightful look into our current employment situation and the state of automated technology. Yet I feel that the focus of the article antagonized technology when the problem lies in the economic system in which that technology resides.

It should not be our plight to create more mindless jobs with low pay, no benefits, and no purpose. I want robots and computers to replace every mundane, repetitive, and soulless task that is currently occupied by a glassy-eyed debt slave that cannot afford to buy breakfast cereal. Those are jobs for machines, not living breathing human beings with souls, imagination, and feelings.

The problem is that our institutions haven’t progressed along with our technology and ability to fulfill human needs. The problem is that our economic system creates disparity, consolidating wealth for a few and poverty for

everyone else. The problem is that our economic system creates scarcity where none would exist. The problem is that the economic system sets humans in adversarial positions instead of working together, fighting tooth and nail for every scrap.

Our political system is irretrievably interwoven with an economic system that sees no further than the end of the current quarter. This is profit obsession in a monetary system that is not based on resource availability but an insatiable hunger for never ending growth. With each passing year this system becomes more difficult to maintain. This money thing is over.

Look at where we’re at now: Every nation is in debt to every other nation. Austerity has become a new trend that cannot hope to balance the tables of our now astronomical debt, but takes away services and necessary resources from the world’s poor. Make no mistake, these debts cannot be repaid. There aren’t enough resources left on the

planet to repay it all.

Technological unemployment is a natural outcome of technological progress, but this is a reflection of our antiquated social system rather than a problem related to our advanced technological state. There will only continue to be more mass unemployment due to technological advancements in the coming years. The answer is not to stifle that progress, but to allow it to do that which it is capable of doing without the hindrance of an economic system that no longer reflects reality.

In the not too distant future nanotechnology, biotechnology, solar power, Artificial Intelligence, advanced robotics, genetic manipulation, 3-D printing, and lightning fast, cheap DNA sequencing will make scarcity a myth. Our already broken economic system based on work for pay will evaporate in the face of abundance. We will have to make the realization that humanity as a species will have the ability to provide for the species in its entirety regardless

of monetary wealth or “jobs” to do. We can simply provide and so we shall. People can actually do things with their time that they’re passionate about unencumbered with the burden of survival.

This perpetuated myth of scarcity is what drives our current system. Meanwhile companies are destroying surpluses of corn, beans, and rice to keep prices inflated. We have enough resources to feed, clothe, and shelter every human being on this planet, but there’s just not enough money to pay for it all. So why not just do it?

Being born as a human being will entitle you to the full heritage of human technological innovation, thousands of years in the making. No one should be excluded because no one individual can claim ownership to the human heritage. In other words, humanity will have to grow up, reconcile itself as a part of nature, and achieve a sustainable balance with it made possible by technology and responsible management of resources.

Discrimination of a different kind

By Marcus Flores

There’s an old saying that goes “I may not agree with what you say, but will defend to the death your right to say it.” This seminal apposition of liberty and tolerance was likely imported from France—Voltaire specifically—in the days when British misrule plagued the American colonies. Consequently, the ideas expressed in those eighteen words have become central to how Americans participate in their economy.

Of course, the meaning of tolerance has been subject to historic vicissitudes. At one time in the United States, African Americans were begrudgingly accepted by their white counterparts so long as they steered clear of certain businesses and sat in specified bus seats (though this was no guarantee against overt acts of violence and injustice). It wasn’t without tireless effort that African Americans eventually gained undiminished citizenship status.

Still, prejudices run deep, particularly when alloyed with a limited religious perspective. Christopher Hitchens, in his book *God is Not Great*, argued that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s influence stemmed from his articulation and intelligence. Because Southerners frequently invoked the Good Book to buttress their pro-segregation views, Dr. King was able to spot the hypocrisy and therefore “outreach the rednecks” by wielding their own religious text against them. Consequently, no one takes seriously the Biblical authorization of slavery or segregation these days.

Yet, other chapters of the Good Book are being used elsewhere.

Hands On

The screen-printing company known as Hands On Originals recently exemplified a modern religious lapse when it cited personal religious conviction as the reason it could not fill an order of shirts for the organizers of a gay pride rally in Lexington. The refusal was immediately denounced by many members of the community as a species of discrimination, while others upheld the business’s supposed freedom to sell (or not) based on conviction. As a champion of the LGBT community and the free market, I confess the event left me suspended in a state of dissonance. When social and religious freedoms

clash, who wins?

Certainly not Blaine Adamson, owner of Hands On Originals, who attempted to defend his decision by citing equal opportunity requirements. Apparently because he hires employees of various sexual orientations, he can refuse service to them—despite the fact Lexington ordinance says otherwise. Since most business owners are likely acquainted with the law, it seems at least plausible that Adamson had in it in mind that he would make a religious statement veiled as an exercise in the free market. A friend of mine flatly observed that if Hands On advertised by way of its shirts, why not avoid a political raucous by omitting the Hands On logo from the order? It’s not like it would inflict any harm to Adamson’s business were he to produce these modified shirts. In fact, he’d quite literally stand to profit from it.

There is, however, a caveat to this sort of reasoning. Consider a hypothetical scenario of the Hands On incident, only in reverse. That is, suppose a homosexually owned screen-printing company is asked to provide shirts for a defense of marriage rally. The design would draw from the paucity of Bible verses supposedly condemning homosexuality.

By the previous arguments, the homosexual company would have virtually no legal leverage for which to decline the business. They would *have* to hold their nose and fill the order.

I liken my attempt to reconcile social and religious freedoms to a kind of mental tennis match, only to find the fairest solution is one in which both players lose. Religious conservatives might have to grit their teeth and serve to homosexuals, just as the homosexuals would have to do in a reversal of the situation.

As for Lexington, signs suggest that residents may be mature enough to accept that both parties’ feelings may be offended in the endless task to secure individual liberties. Lexington’s swift reaction to Hands On was laudable in that both Fayette County Schools and the University of Kentucky—not exactly small customers—quickly reviewed and in some instances, halted, massive orders from the company. They spotted the discrimination and had no interest in being involved with such a company. Facing a legal investigation, Mr. Adamson, meanwhile, has scooped out a mortise and planted his cross in it.



Looking both ways on Limestone

By Joseph Anthony

Al’s Bar has gentrified Limestone.

For years I’d drive up Limestone on my way home, turning left on Sixth. But it got too depressing, and the ladies of the night (and day), loitering in front of the bar on the corner, trying to catch the eye of passing motorists, too sad looking. The city’s annual sting operation, where it would replace the regulars with fairly attractive police women, would boost the scenery for a few days. But when the police had finished gleaning the low end of the John-gene-pool, it was back to the regular routine.

The transformed Al’s Bar has changed all that. And now that the liquor store across the street from Al’s, (another fountain of drugs and prostitution) has been replaced by the Home-Grown Press, good old fashioned vice has had to go looking for greener (browner?) fields. I know Studs Terkel, a writer who celebrated the vitality of urban grit, wouldn’t like it. But I’m a bit more ambiguous.

It’s very hard to think intelligently and objectively about gentrification.

At the other end of Sixth, the old Rainbow Bakery factory has been transformed into the sixth street mini-brewery, with artists’ lofts, roller derby girls, and non-profits in the rest of the megabuilding. It is helping to metamorphose the north end of Jefferson.

I’m not ambiguous about Sixth Street: I’m very happy.

But the poor renters in the neighborhood are beginning to get nervous. Coolavin Apartments, the privately-owned complex with a low-rent clientele at the end of Sixth, is rumored to be up for sale. Coolavin is one of those places where we traditionally put our poor in Lexington—the western end of a Northside street, tucked in by the railroad. We stuffed the Hope Center for homeless men right across from it. Who would have thought we’d ever want that land? Whether the rumor pans out or not, the logic seems clear: the land, close to the new BCTC campus and a revitalized Jefferson, is now much too valuable for poor people.

These poor people aren’t hookers on Limestone, aren’t drug-dealers on Upper. They are just people who need low rents—people who work jobs that often make the city possible, but that don’t pay much.

We hide our poor in Lexington. We shuttle them off in outlying districts like Bluegrass Aspendale or Winburn. Until we need the land and then urban-renewal swathes through like a Webb brother through Main Street. The newer neighborhoods have no poor. It was the older

models that used to keep them nearby in little out of sight streets up and down the Northside so they’d be handy as ready sources of maids and yards-men. The tiny bungalows of Smith Street and Wily serviced big-housed Sixth Street and Fayette Park.

Nowadays, thirty thousand or so would transform those bungalows into cute little cottages. But not for the poor.

Welcome to the other side of gentrification.

North of Center has had a running sort of battle with gentrification. In particular, it’s taken aim at the concept of changing one-way streets into two-way. I had always thought that one-way streets was generally a traffic-engineer’s idea of getting the suburbanites through the city’s center quickly with not much thought of what they did to it. Two-way streets slowed things down, made life more possible. But *North of Center’s* vehement opposition articles to the whole two-way concept have surprised me, making me think something else was going on.

I think that something else is fear of gentrification. Two-way streets make life possible, but for the newcomers to the neighborhood. We didn’t care if the poor didn’t like the one-way highways that cut through their neighborhoods. My suspicion is that the anger at the two-way street suggestions is really anger at the catering to the new genteelism, a reaction to the quite justified fear that city resources will be disproportionately spent for the sensibilities and tastes of the newcomers, and that the existing poor will be shoved aside. Two-way streets are seen as the camel’s nose under and upending the old neighborhood tent. The developer’s beak, so to speak.

This may be true. But here’s the rub: I think two-way streets make life better for everyone, even the poor. I like other aspects of gentrification, too. Some lower-income folks drink at the new Al’s bar alongside more than a few gentrification agnostics, listening to poetry being recited in the gallery. (Poetry wasn’t a big part of the old bar’s entertainment.)

I don’t need Stud Terkel grit, but I respect the rich diversity poor people bring. I want to fight to help the poor stay. I’m glad Al’s bar has shoed away the drug dealers. I don’t think the poor have to go away, too. It will be a challenge to find a way for them to stay as the neighborhood gentrifies. We should pick our battles, though. Raise our voices about the displaced Coolavin residents if the rumor proves true. But two-way streets? I doubt that having to look both ways on Limestone will matter to the poor, one way or another, especially now that most of the ladies have moved on to other blocks.

“Women are smart and informed, and do not just want a woman with whom to connect; they want the opportunity to speak.”

The “woman problem” in politics

By Cannon-Marie Green Milby
and Jonathan S. Milby

In early April, struggling to connect with women voters and trailing President Obama by 19 percent in approval ratings among women, presidential candidate Mitt Romney introduced his wife Ann as his advisor on “women’s economic issues.”

On April 11, Democratic strategist Hilary Rosen landed herself at the top of the list of “most hated” women in America by stating on *Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees* that, “What you have is Mitt Romney running around the country saying, ‘Well, you know, my wife tells me that what women really care about are economic issues, and when I listen to my wife that’s what I’m hearing.’ Guess what? His wife has actually never worked a day in her life. She’s never really dealt with the kinds of economic issues that a majority of the women in this country are facing in terms of how do we feed our kids, how do we send them to school, and why we worry about their future.”

When Rosen questioned Ann Romney’s qualifications to be an advisor on women’s economic issues, Rosen shattered the safekeeping of women in presidential politics. In the words of Linda DiVall, a Republican pollster, it was “unbelievably shocking to hear another woman talk about Ann Romney in such a way.” Evidently, it has been hard for the public and pundits alike to come to terms with women disagreeing with each other.

The message taken away from Rosen’s answer to Cooper’s question was that stay-at-home mothers do not work. However, Rosen was actually arguing that Mitt Romney does not take women seriously, and she was right.

The woman problem

The difficulty is that no one can figure out how to accept women in politics at the presidential level, despite the fact that women voters are considered the

most important voting bloc in the 2012 presidential election.

Since 1964, women have cast more votes than men in every presidential election. The exits polls from the 2008 presidential elections showed that women represent 53% of the electorate. In that election, women cast 70.4 million votes, almost 10 million more than men. Now, women voters are the golden goose of the 2012 presidential campaign.

However, women have continued to be bound by the certain rules governing their voting “etiquette.” Through twelve elections from 1964 to 2008, women voted within the yolk of three rules that Betty Friedan identified in her book *The Feminine Mystique*:

Rule #1: Women are not interested in politics, unless it’s related to an immediate need in the home, like the price of coffee.

Rule #2: Modern woman’s participation in politics is through her role as wife and mother.

Rule #3: Educated women have the unique opportunity to influence men and boys.

Unfailingly, women (as voters and as campaign participants) in presidential politics behaved, playing by these rules. They were familiar and navigable, and they protected the “gentle femininity” of women. In the White House, First Ladies remained typecast as the window to their husband’s humanity.

This seemed like good news, particularly for former Governor of Massachusetts Mitt Romney, because over 70 million votes are up for grabs in the 2012 presidential cycle, and all he had to do was get women voters to follow the Pied Piper: his wife. With little known about Ann Romney and few, if any, past controversies to address, Team Romney set out to strategically place this golden-haired beauty from Bloomfield Hills, Michigan at the front of the line. Women would follow Mrs. Romney for three simple reasons: mother of five boys, diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, survivor of breast cancer.

Presidential spouses

Michelle Obama and Ann Romney symbolize the diversity of American women; in fact, their strong difference makes using them as appropriate role models for women problematic.

Michelle Obama was raised in Chicago by working-class parents and Ivy League educated. She married after establishing her career, became a mother in her mid-thirties, and still held her position with University of Chicago Medical Center on a part-time basis during the 2008 presidential primary cycle, eventually taking an unpaid leave of absence to work on Barack’s campaign.

In contrast, Ann Romney was raised in Michigan and attended an all-girls private school. She graduated from Brigham Young University with a concentration in French. Ann Romney married at nineteen and had her first of five sons one year later. She stayed home to raise her children.

Michelle Obama is the modern woman juggling being a wife, mother, and career woman. Ann Romney is a throwback to the 1960s.

Somehow, when Rosen questioned Ann Romney’s political chops as an economic advisor, the situation was played out by the media and others as a vicious attack, making Ann Romney the perceived victim of the latest “assault” on traditional family values.

Michelle Obama gracefully and strategically rose to the occasion tweeting that “every mother works hard, and every woman deserves to be respected”—a statement that did not really take a position on what had become an explosive issue.

This exchange about the authority of a woman to speak on behalf of all American women is a variation on a theme from 2008. Many will remember Joe the Plumber from the McCain campaign. In essence, Joe set a new precedent that made anyone an expert on policy issues simply by virtue of being an American. This authority was so powerful that it was politically unquestionable.

The same holds true when women are plugged into this equation. Here’s the political calculus: Ann Romney was presented as a qualified advisor on women’s economic issues by virtue of being a woman. When Rosen questioned Ann Romney’s qualifications for the position, Rosen broke an unspoken rule of polite society. Rosen became the Hester Prynne of female politics, branded with a scarlet letter.

Thinking women

With more women in politics—on both sides of the aisle—women are more closely assessing the people chosen to speak on their behalf. In most cases, this is considered normal and advisable. Would-be experts are generally instructed to neither embellish their credentials nor use irrelevant personal information to demonstrate their qualifications.

Mitt Romney broke these rules by naming his wife as his expert on women’s economic issues. Working in the home to raise children is a noble and certainly difficult job. However, that alone does not automatically qualify one as an expert on women’s economic issues, particularly when Ann Romney and her family have never dealt with the financial issues facing most American women. Relevant education, knowledge, and experience are necessary to be an advisor on women’s economic issues, and it appears that Ann Romney is short in all of those areas.

This distinction matters. Women voters have concerns about specific policy issues. Women are smart and informed, and do not just want a woman with whom to connect; they want the opportunity to speak, and they expect to be heard. And, if an advisor must be chosen to communicate their policy positions, women voters want a presidential candidate to use the same criteria and judgment he or she would use in vetting an advisor on any other policy issue—not just default to the woman closest by.

Boots Riley (cont.)

continued from page 1

it is because the working class in the US is not politically ready for change.”

“That’s been the story, but what I’ve always thought is that people don’t *think* they can change it and that’s the key... People know that the system is unjust but feel like there is no movement that they can join that has any possibility of doing anything about it. I think Occupy Wall Street changed that for a lot of people. There was all of the sudden this feeling that ‘wow, this is a movement that can do something.’”

Boots described the brutal attack of Oakland protesters by police in late October. This was the same protest during which Iraq War veteran and Occupy Oakland supporter Scott Olsen was nearly killed when he was hit in the head with a tear gas canister shot at him at close range by a police officer.

“The police kept shooting tear gas and rubber bullets at us. And when that happens you run away... But we just kept marching around the block and coming back at them, and I think that scared them as much as anything because they could clear us out for a few minutes but we’d just come back... We just kept coming back all night. They spent 3 million dollars to keep us out of that square that day. We knew that they couldn’t keep that up. We knew we would win at some point.”

The following day, Occupy protesters retook Oscar Grant Plaza and three thousand people showed up for that night’s General Assembly. “We used the moment,” Boots said, “the fact that the world was watching because of what happened to Scott Olsen and because of how brutal the police were to us all, we used that moment to call for a General Strike. I think that many of us that called for it and many of us that voted

for it didn’t think that it would necessarily happen, you know, [but] we knew that the call was important.”

By this point, the media was unable to ignore the Occupy movement. Its slogan, “We are the 99%,” was being openly discussed in mainstream news sources. But, as the Coup frontman recalled, calling for a General Strike would push the message further. It would remind people that “we can stop the wheels of industry.”

And Oakland did. Estimates are that some 50,000 people participated in the strike and blockade of the country’s fourth largest port, resulting in \$8 million in losses. The success of the strike and the port shutdown had ripple effects on people’s political and economic consciousness.

“Among people that I grew up with in Oakland” Boots said, “a lot of people were like ‘we’re done with that marching shit, that marching shit doesn’t get shit done.’ ...Those criticisms come up with any movement, but it was different after we shut down the port for the first time. People saw it, you know, they saw the economic relationship between labor and capital. And that’s one of the biggest things they saw, that ok, even if you only want to make reforms, that’s something we need to do... mess with their pocketbooks.”

Overcoming difference

Boots ended by discussing the necessity of developing strong relationships of solidarity and overcoming internal divisions if we are to build an effective democratic and progressive movement. “Sectarianism,” he said, “plays out in various ways, but I think the idea of the whole Occupy Wall Street Movement is the anti-thesis of sectarianism. It’s one thing that we needed [...] We need to

cut through that bullshit and just say, ‘Ok, here is the campaign. We all need to work together on this.’ Around the world, if we are going to fight capitalism, that is what we are going to have to do. We are going to have to figure out how to overcome our differences. And we are not going to figure that out before we start working together, you know.”

He’s right, of course. We are looking at an exceptional opportunity right now. If we are smart and determined and relentless and willing to step up the struggle in these kinds of ways, we can build a successful progressive, international movement against corporate greed, corruption, inequality, and capitalism. For all its virtues, this system has failed the majority of people on this planet and will continue to do so. But it is not immutable. We can make something much more just and much more human if we want.

One thing that Boots did not mention at the talk is that there is a call across the entire Occupy network for a mass General Strike on May 1 – International Worker’s Day! Occupy Oakland has announced, however, that they will not be trying to shut down the port this time. That’s because this time the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) are planning to join in the General Strike themselves. On May Day, let’s all join in to “mess with their pocketbooks” and “stop the wheels of industry.”

As Boots puts it in one of The Coup’s songs, “Shut the jobby-job down at noon and don’t disperse!” Unfortunately, this is the only thing corporate oligarchs seem to listen to.

Love and solidarity from Amsterdam.

Watch the whole talk plus clips from the concert at www.iire.org.

North of Center is a periodical, a place, and a perspective. Read on to find out what that means.

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MAY 2012

I'm not from here by Kenn Minter



notfromherecomic.blogspot.com

Letters to the editor

Who's your neighbor?

The book of Acts 4:16 asks a great question that was directed toward the Apostles, Peter and John. "What are we to do with these men?" And that sounds like an appropriate question for the leadership of Southland Christian Center ("Who is my neighbor," April). However, looking to chapter 5 of Acts, a wise Pharisee named Gamaliel gave some profound advice that could benefit us all. "If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" Although I see pertinent arguments on both sides of the pond, I might suggest that people begin to pray for God's will to be done. I would love to know what the outcome will be!

Mary Jane Battista

Downtown streets

I couldn't agree with you more ("Meddling with city streets," April). Two way Main is wrong way Main ! I don't see someone stuck in traffic suddenly saying, "Gee, since I'm not moving, I'll get out and shop at this store or eat at this restaurant." If someone needs to get from E. Main to Newtown, let them travel smoothly thru downtown and maybe they will come back another time to do business. If they avoid downtown due to congestion, they will never come down for entertainment or a meal. I'm old enough to remember gridlock on Main during rush hour, and there is far more traffic today than there was 40 years ago.

Howard Stovall
Town Branch Market,
233 E. Main St.

I lived in Lexington in the '60s when all the streets were 2 way. Population 50k—60k. Traffic was horrible. Driving through town was very difficult. Now population is 400k. Imagine Upper St and Short St. and High St. all 2 way: Madness. Put the idea to a vote of the people. Who are these people that make decisions like this without consulting the people?

Alan Isaacs

I have somewhat mixed feelings about the street conversion idea. I live downtown and as much as I hate to admit it, the one way streets can be confusing and difficult to navigate. As much as I think they are a bunch of wimps, I do hear enough people that live in the suburbs complaining about how difficult it is to get around down town, and I have to grudgingly admit that they might have a point.

On the other hand, your points about moving a greater volume of traffic, safety, and less pollution are pretty convincing. As a cyclist I do feel safer on one way streets since you don't have to

worry about oncoming traffic.

If the benefits are mixed at best, it probably isn't worth the trouble and expense of fooling with it. There are other more important problems for the city to deal with.

I am sorry to see you quote Randal O'Toole in your article. That guy has the reputation of being a pro suburban sprawl hack.

Dan

Author responds:

Thanks for the comments. Dan, you busted me on Randall O'Toole. I'm sorry to have quoted him as well because it wasn't necessary: the evidence demonstrates the truth of the quoted statement. Conversion proponents, on the other hand, rarely bother to support their claims with any evidence. And for over a decade now they have insisted that 2-way street conversion is essen-

tial, yet can point to no city where conversion has made a difference. I have much more to say on the subject and am grateful to *NoC* for providing this forum for discussing it.

David Shattuck

Human trafficking

The concept of labour slavery ("Modern day abolition and its price," April) has never left the US. The prison industry is a collusion of big business and government. For decades these governments have created laws that are based on perpetuating expensive police and federal agencies like the DEA, ATF, etc...and criminalize the use of substances other than tobacco, alcohol or pharmaceuticals. This legality or illegality occurs regardless of the actual harm connected to their use and perpetuates a black market in these substances as well as higher levels of crime and violence.

Now that the "independent lawmakers" both federal and state have created laws and penalties, the "human resources" snared by these laws is passed on to the corporate for profit prison industry. Slavery is the inevitable result of these corporate prisons (and government run prisons as well) when they exploit this

resource by creating manufacturing/farming/telemarketing/etc jobs for prisoners who are then paid pennies per hour, given a high starch/low protein diet, housed in minimal space and forced to pay for the "benefits" like the meals they eat and the bunks they sleep on. Rebellion against this slavery results in extra time, beatings, torture and death.

Fenian, from Smirking Chimp blog

Our man

Love your post, Michael Marchman ("My life as a migrant worker," April), and love lots about Kentucky although I wish I knew more. Our previous socioeconomic status has left with the economy. We have to face the fact that

it is gone for good, get over it and get on with it. For me, that means finding a way to survive the upcoming transition to self reliance. It could be viewed as a nice problem solving opportunity. I'm looking for a place on a fresh water, maybe the Ohio River, in a medium size city far away from nuclear power plants, maybe Louisville. Don't know if L'ville has any kind of like minded community, though....

Cameron Salisbury, from Smirking Chimp blog

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