



People's Organizing Committee Return, Rebuild, Resist!



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Work begins at NOSC's new headquarters

Survivor Council Ready to Move into New Quarters

The New Orleans Survivor Council is ready to move into its new headquarters at the Old Pathway Church on Alabo Street in the Lower Ninth Ward! The Reconstruction Committee, with the help of two small grants, ran a six-week training project in October-November. The Council was able to hire and train five trainees and several trainers. Volunteer tradespeople also provided indispensable and much appreciated help. The project succeeded in getting the Church almost ready for use. We are only waiting for an electrician to guide and certify the electrical work so the lights can be turned on and the walls closed up. The Church has agreed to allow the Survivor Council use of the facility for one year in exchange for fixing it up.

In addition to moving into the Church, the Survivor Council has developed a volunteer Leadership Team, which is poised to take over all the resources of People's Organizing Committee. This includes the bank account and finances, the vehicles, the office computers, and supervision of all staff and volunteers.

When POC was formed in April, it was committed to the principle of bottom-up

organizing: that those most affected by Katrina should lead the effort to return and rebuild. POC has consistently helped residents come together and learn to lead their own work, while using its resources and organizers under the direction of Survivor Council decisions. This transition from POC control of resources to direct Survivor Council control has been our goal from the beginning, and we are proud and happy that it is about to happen!



Trainees install sheetrock at Old Pathways

Reconstruction-Training Project Fulfills Principle of Serving Most in Need

In addition to preparing the Church for Survivor Council Occupancy, the reconstruction-training program also made a major start to the work of rebuilding a home in the Lower Ninth. In keeping with the Survivor Council principle, the home chosen belongs to an elderly couple who currently live in a trailer park and do not have the resources to hire people to fix their home. Although the home is not yet finished, we made great headway by jacking up the home and completely replacing the foundation and main structural elements.

DONATIONS NEEDED

Help continue this work! Send donations to:

POC/IFCO
418 W. 145th Street
New York, NY 10031

Trailer Park Organizing Comes Together with “Guest Workers”

Last year, hundreds of thousands of poor and working class black New Orleans residents were forced from their homes, herded into buses and airplanes and snatched from their homes and communities. Some residents were relocated to various cities, while others were placed in FEMA trailer camps throughout the Gulf Coast. To this day, only a handful has been able to return home. Almost immediately Latin American workers were recruited, lured by promises of financial security and a better future for their families and communities, to come and work in New Orleans.

These poor black residents of New Orleans were essentially “replaced” by a new and more profitable working class. The majority of these new workers came to New Orleans through the Guest Worker Program, in which immigrants are given temporary “H2B” visas, which are valid only as long as the worker is employed by the US company who recruited them. However, this presents a problem for the workers because most of them are forced to take out high interest loans in order to get the visa, and once they get here they don’t get paid enough to even repay the loan. If their employment is terminated for any reason, the visa is no longer valid, and they are faced with the double-edged sword of returning home with more debt than they started with or remaining in the country illegally to try to make back their money.

The corporations that participate in the guest worker program do so only for the economic benefits. In the shipbuilding industry, for example, an inexperienced US citizen would expect to make roughly \$14 - \$15 dollars an hour, but the company knows it they go to impoverished countries in South and Central America, \$8 an hour is a respectable rate, so they actively recruit workers to come to the US and work for these rates. The guest worker program is a blatant form of modern day slavery! The parallels between this program and the trans-

Atlantic slave trade of a few centuries ago are clear. When these companies found a cheaper source of labor in another country, they went there, tricked the people into coming, and remain in complete control of the situation! They bring in a new group of workers every ten months or so, and keep the cycle going.



Renaissance trailer camp

Meanwhile, it has been virtually impossible for the “old” working class to return to New Orleans and resume their jobs. The biggest obstacle to people returning has been the housing situation, whether they used to be homeowners, renters, or public housing residents. Poor homeowners have been given virtually no assistance, renters have been unable to return because of the double and triple increases in rents, public housing residents have been unable to return because all of the Projects have been closed, barred, and scheduled for demolition. The message is clear; the powers that be do not want poor black people back in New Orleans! They already have a new, cheaper working class; in their minds, there is no reason for these people to return.

But the people have already said that they *want* to return! The New Orleans Survivor Council organizers (POC) have been reaching out to those displaced residents in the FEMA trailer camps for several months now.

Most of the trailer camps are in remote locations: small towns, nature reserves, airport land, etc. In these locations, it is virtually impossible for residents to find employment, hard for them to find transportation, and a very depressing situation overall. One of the parks that we found was in an isolated state park in Mississippi, the nearest town about twenty minutes away by car. A few of the residents

shared their story with us. They were bused from New Orleans to a community center in Mississippi where they stayed for about two and a half months. After that the majority were placed in this state park, away from everyone and everything. One resident stated that she had been looking for employment since she had arrived at the park ten months prior, and had been unable to find any because the nearest town had no jobs. Even if they did, she had no transportation. So, she sits in her trailer all day, and confided that she has been terribly depressed since the day she arrived; that her children are the only reason she keeps going.

Even in Baker, Louisiana, where they have a bus shuttle that takes residents from one camp to another, Baton Rouge, and to the local Wal-Mart, the residents feel the same way. Most are very depressed, mainly because of the extremity of their plight. They have been unable to receive any assistance to return home. What's worse is that they have been unable to improve their position. Those who have searched for employment have been turned down as soon as employers find out they are from New Orleans. Many residents have remarked that, "unless you know someone out here, you won't find a job". They are giving up hope with every passing day.

However, the Baker Survivor Council meets regularly to discuss issues and problems that they face, including how they will get home, and how to create more unity among the residents. They hosted a meeting with some "guest workers" to get to know each other and share common problems. They have helped gut homes in New Orleans, recently sponsored a basketball tournament in the park, and have instituted a weekly cookout in Renaissance Park. Organizing is also beginning in the Greenwell Springs Trailer Camp in Baton Rouge.

Our vision of the FEMA trailer camp project is the unification of these past slaves (the poor black community) and the new slaves (the guest workers). We recognize that it is the same set of people – business and government – that have colluded to keep both of our communities down, and artificially separate us from each

other: in reality we are one people! Once we come together, our vision is that together, we will rebuild New Orleans and create communities where we will live together, work together, and support each other in whatever ways possible.

Public Housing Residents Fight Back

In the last two to three weeks, public housing residents have been taking strong and active roles in the fight to return home. The People's Organizing Committee, the Advancement Project, the Loyola Law Clinic, the NAACP, the United Front for Affordable Housing, and the Survivor Village have all benefited from their direction and leadership. Residents from



June: residents at Florida try to return home

various developments, including Lafitte, C.J. Pete, St. Bernard, Florida, Desire, B.W. Cooper, Guste and various scatter sites have met every second and third Thursday of each month. They call themselves Residents of Public Housing.

The New Orleans Survivor Council works through Residents for Public Housing to help bring poor and working class black people back home to New Orleans. A couple of weeks ago, the New Orleans Survivor Council and Residents of Public Housing, in partnership with the People's Organizing Committee and the Advancement Project sponsored transportation, child care and food for residents to travel from Houston to New Orleans in order to challenge HANO and HUD in their efforts to demolish the homes of public housing residents. The groups also participated in mobilizing public housing

residents and supporters in Baton Rouge and New Orleans to address HANO and HUD. Over 300 public housing residents and over 200 supporters came together and denounced HANO and HUD and their efforts to take homes away from the people even though the homes are livable.

Residents of Public Housing has vowed to reoccupy their homes whether HANO & HUD do the right thing or not. They assert that HANO & HUD do not have the authority or the power to deny them their right to return home. Residents from several developments are in the process of developing reoccupation plans and are readying themselves to take on HANO, HUD, the city, the federal government and all others who stand in their way.

As a result of the strong and vocal opposition of public housing residents and their supporters to the HANO and HUD demolition plans, private developers and others who have been planning to make millions off of the demolition of public housing and the suffering of poor and working class black people have gone back to the drawing board. Now, private developers have been pushing HANO and HUD to open up at least some of the units in the development so that public housing residents can stop putting up so much resistance. Residents of Public Housing have said that all who want to return to their homes have the right to return to their homes and there will be no compromise on that.



The New Orleans Survivor Council meets every first and third Saturday at Caffin and Claiborne, at 11:00 A.M.

More Volunteers Headed to New Orleans!

In December, January and February, student volunteers are once again headed our way. Last spring and summer, hundreds of volunteers devoted time under the direction of the New Orleans Survivor Council and its People's Organizing Committee organizers, gutting scores of homes, spreading the word about Survivor Council meetings and activities, going door-to-door in trailer parks and learning lessons to take back with them. We are gearing up to put volunteers to use again soon!



Summer volunteer meeting

Bottom-up Organizing in New Orleans Inspires International Discussion

Bottom-up organizing means helping the people most impacted by the problems to lead themselves. Since Katrina, we've discovered that mostly nobody wants to do this. Therefore, POC has sent out questions to start a dialog on how to understand our situation and deal with it. If you would like to read the questions and participate in the discussion, go to our website or write to us at our office. See the box below for the addresses.

**If We Don't Think It, It Ain't for Us
People's Organizing Committee**

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504-872-9591
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Send Donations to: IFCO; 418 W. 145th St.; New York, NY, 10031

