

Report from Breakout Sessions

June 13, 2009 New New Deal Organizing Conference

Breakout Session: Militarism + Employee Free Choice Act

1. Framing: with the decline of decent job opportunities in the US, more and more poor and working class youth are forced to look for careers in the US military. As a counter to that, we recommend promoting union jobs to youth as a better source of long term career opportunities. Further we should oppose vigorously the idea that mercenary work offers realistic career paths for youth. Mercenary armies are harmful to our democracy.
 - Action: Promote EFCA as a way to make it easier for youth to gain access to union jobs that offer a decent salary, benefits and long-term job stability.
 - Action: Make youth aware that the military offers sub-minimum wage pay and unpredictable educational opportunities, while union jobs offer high wages, benefits and rights.
 - Action: Stop funding mercenaries armies and security services
 - Action: Make more training in high skill jobs available through high schools and junior colleges.
 - Action: Endorse the re-industrialization of the United States
2. Framing: Investing in productive jobs in the domestic economy produces more and better job opportunities than investing in military production. Plus military production results in little or no useful product.
 - Action: Promote substantial reduction of military spending and reallocation to a productive Green economy.
 - Action: Promote the Blue/Green Alliance
3. Framing: Obama is pushing youth to take part in community service.
 - Action: Promote volunteer work with unions as a viable part of the Obama program.
4. Framing: Our current volunteer military is undemocratic because it incorporates an unofficial “poverty draft”.
 - Action: Consider promoting an official draft that would affect the rich and poor. That would be more democratic and would revive opposition to militarism.
5. Framing: Unions and peace oriented groups should develop multifaceted communication/media campaigns that shows the relationship between war, jobs and the economy in ways that are understandable to the general public.
 - Action: American Friends Service Committee and Chicago Federation of labor jointly develop media campaigns on issues of common interest such as EFCA and the reallocation of war funding to the Green Economy, etc.
6. Framing: Create support for Conscientious Objector state, create international relationships that promote (win-win) peaceful economic development and avoids military relationships ??

7. Framing: Working together, union and peace activists will more likely achieve the political goals of both groups.
 - Action: Union and peace activists should work together in campaigns designed to promote specific legislation such as EFCA and war spending reduction.
 - Action: Join in each other's public actions such as picketing and peace marches.
 8. Framing: Build awareness of the role Wall Street plays in manipulating the economy and supporting war.
 - Oppose refunding the IMF
 - Demand and end to foreign wars
 9. Framing: Women's issues should be included in the campaigns that promote unionism and peace and justice.
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Breakout Session: Mortgages/ Foreclosures + Healthcare

Jeff Bartow of the Southwest Organizing Project told us about an epidemic of foreclosures on the South and Southwest Sides, especially in black and Latino neighborhoods such as Marquette Park. The majority of foreclosures are due to sub-prime refinancing deals -- that is, long-term residents who took out second mortgages, not new-home buyers. SWOP began campaigning against predatory lenders during the housing boom, with an emphasis on providing counseling. As the foreclosures spread they realized counseling alone could never solve the problem.

Their current targets are the major lenders like Bank of America, Wells Fargo etc. They are demanding a three-part plan: loan modifications, including reducing the principal if necessary; programs to keep families in their homes as renters if modification won't work; and a commitment to rent or sell the vacant homes already owned by banks, to get them re-occupied.

Ebonee Stevenson of Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP) has worked for affordable housing by organizing former CTA tenants, those with Section 8 vouchers and those being forced out of neighborhoods by gentrification. Many former CTA tenants have been sent out on the private market with Section 8 vouchers, while money for Section 8 has been slashed. STOP is also fighting to preserve public medical care. They won a round recently, stopping the closing of four city mental health clinics through a sit-in at Daley's office and other actions.

Giudi Weiss of Ill. Single Payer Network explained their campaign to pass House Bill 676, a single payer health system defined as "Improved Medicare for All." They have been reaching out to various groups to explain why Obama's plan, adding an undefined "public option" to the private for-profit insurance, will not solve the problem.

ACTIONS: One action campaign that involves both STOP and the Single Payer Network is the fight against patient dumping at the University of Chicago Hospital. They are part of a coalition called CHART which has brought together hospital workers from Teamsters 743, community groups and health care activists. As a result, the unionists are now firm supporters of single-payer, and the community groups

support the workers' issues. A protest march against the U of C's plan to close its 47th Street womens' clinic is planned for Hyde Park in late June.

SWOP is working with other organizations on a proposed Cook County ordinance imposing mandatory mediation on mortgage lenders. Laws like this have been passed in Philadelphia and Orlando; it's reported that in Philly, over 70% of foreclosure victims now stay in their homes. A group called Action Now is coordinating the effort in Chicago.

Important links:

- <http://www.STOPchicago.org>
- <http://www.swopchicago.org>
- <http://www.actionnow.org>
- <http://www.ilsinglepayercoalition.org>

Breakout Session: Employee Free Choice Act + Mortgages/ Foreclosures

On EFCA:

- (1) Contact friends/organizations in IN and ask them to lobby Bayh.
- (2) Organize for 50,000 Labor Day Good Jobs at Living Wages;
- (3) Participate in the November Jobs Conference initiated by National Jobs for All Coalition
- (4) Organize for Consumer Financial Products Safety Commission

On Mortgages:

- (1) Support bankruptcy judge powers to change terms of mortgages in foreclosure
- (2) Strengthen the mortgage loan disclosure data base
- (3) Update and revise CRA legislation

Breakout Session: Militarism + Healthcare

On healthcare:

Establish a committee or umbrella group to contacted elected officials with a coordinated and unified message: Healthcare is a fundamental human right. Also do outreach to unions and community groups with the same message. Also gather and publicize single payer success stories. (Rationales for this proposal: Many groups are doing excellent work on single payer, but the work is often uncoordinated, and the messages often vary. In addition, many unions in Illinois have not endorsed single payer, and opponents of single payer are spreading false horror stories. This proposal is designed to address all of those issues.)

On War and Militarism:

1. Build support for an existing campaign to bring the National Guard Home. Rationale: (a) this would strike a powerful blow against the notion that the war has popular support, and (b) the law authorizing the foreign deployment of the guard has expired, which provides us with opportunities (see <http://www.bringtheguardhome.org>).
2. Stop efforts to militarize schools and support ongoing counter-recruitment efforts. Rationale: Aside from the intrinsic value of stopping the militarization of schools and supporting counter-recruitment efforts, this would (or could) help establish ties with racially and nationally oppressed communities.

On a Combined Approach:

Contact elected officials about supplemental funding. Urge them to fund healthcare for veterans and women who have been subject to sexual assaults in the military. (Rationale: This connects cutting funding for war with funding for human needs, in this case, healthcare for veterans; and it also addresses the sexism in the military).
