

REPORT ON JUNE 13TH NEW NEW DEAL ORGANIZING CONFERENCE

by the New New Deal Planning Committee

Overview

On June 13, 2009 the New New Deal Project brought together more than 100 politically committed individuals from more than 40 organizations throughout the Chicago metropolitan area. The conference was organized around four core issues: housing and foreclosures, labor organizing and the Employee Free Choice Act, health care and the single payer movement, and militarism and the federal budget. The goals of the conference were two: first, to move beyond education about the current economic crisis to developing proposals for action and, second, by bringing together progressive activists working in the four different areas to explore possibilities of joint activities that would link these causes.

The conference was entitled “A *New New Deal* – How We Make It Happen” to emphasize the most important lessons learned during the Great Depression and the New Deal era of 1930s. Then, as now, the election of a liberal and sympathetic administration was not enough to consolidate the gains of the progressive movement, nor was it enough to push through fundamental changes necessary to deal with the economic crisis. However, the political opening, combined with the heightened urgency for action to deal with the economic and social crises, helped cultivate a renaissance of labor and community organizing which led to deep reforms and big progressive changes.

Now, faced with an analogous situation, our job is to contribute to building a united, effective, and influential progressive popular movement. That requires each of us to work on strengthening our ties with other elements of the broader progressive movement, working to build long- term relationships and alliances. Only such alliances, mobilizing from below, can defend and extend whatever progressive inclinations might emerge from within the administration, and resist administration tendencies to capitulate to the center-right forces. Political events during the two months since the conference have highlighted the need for a united progressive movement that can give voice to the issues and concerns of the large majority of our people who are not represented by the right wing populism that has captured the media’s attention.

Program

The program began with four plenary talks in which the speakers, all active in one or more of the core issue area, outlined the parameters of the issue and highlighted opportunities and obstacles for progressives. The speakers did a good job of linking the community and metropolitan level implications of the issues with the national political

landscape. The video of presentation by the plenary speakers will be available at: <http://www.opctj.org/newnewdeal/>.

The break-out sessions were designed to be the heart of the conference. These sessions had two goals that flowed from the conception of the conference. The first was for activists in the various areas to describe specific ongoing activities and programs they were directly involved in and to suggest how others could join in their work. We believe that this goal was achieved in all the sessions. A significant amount of ongoing activity was detailed with much information shared among workshop participants. Further, all four core issues were linked at the systemic analysis level as arising out of the same fundamental power disparities – the dominance of corporate and military interests in the current political/ social /economic order. Activists were urged to support and attend each other’s activities and promote their particular struggles as an aspect of a broad social movement.

The second and more ambitious goal was to develop proposals for cross-issue organizing forms and programs that would untie progressive activists not only ideologically but organizationally and structurally. We knew that this would be a challenge. Many progressives have spent considerable time and energy organizing around a particular issue and, while supportive in general of the work that others are doing, we often know relatively little about the politics of these other issues and have given limited thought to the interconnections between issues. The linkages implied in our shared general, systemic analysis are seldom explored.

We believe that the break-out sessions represented a good first step in overcoming this silo thinking and organizing. Participants were interested in the idea of linking issues and, even where these linkages were difficult to formulate, there was spirited discussion and real efforts to think about common strategy and tactics. One of the measures of this commitment on the part of conference participants was the very high level of continued participation into the report back session; we did not experience the frequent fall off in attendance and participation as the day drew to a close.

Some of the most innovative ideas for linking political work across issues included:

- (1) The AFSC and CFL should jointly develop media campaigns on redirection of war funding to the green economy;
- (2) Housing and trade activists should link their issues through an analysis of the impact of income stagnation on mortgage defaults;
- (3) Veteran and single payer groups should together lobby public officials around health care for veterans, and for services for women who have been subject to sexual assault in the military, using the single payer model embedded in the VA system.
- (4) EFCA should be promoted as a policy that would help youth gain access to union jobs that offer a decent salary, benefits and long-term income and thus housing stability

The complete list of proposals developed from the break out session is available here:

Future Plans

The New New Deal Organizing Committee has concluded that, as a first step, the conference was both successful and holds promise for future work.

We will convene a meeting this fall of representatives from the organizations that participated in and/or endorsed the New New Deal conference as well as other progressive organizations. In particular, beyond the groups represented at the Conference, we seek to expand the representation of people of color, immigrants, and young people in the New New Deal Project.

The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss the organizational and structural fragmentation that weakens all our progressive movements and to propose ways of transcending this. The New New Deal Conference revealed a significant amount of ideological agreement and a shared broad strategic framework among a large group of progressive activists. Our next task – and the goal of the fall meeting - is to determine how to turn this shared framework into organizational and political power.

More Information:

Additional Information, including more detailed reports from the breakout sessions held during the conference, is available at:

<http://www.opctj.org/newnewdeal/>