

**U.S. SOCIAL FORUM  
NATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE  
POLITICAL POSITION PAPERS**

**DECEMBER 2011**

*With contributions from:*

Center for Media Justice  
East Michigan Environmental Action Council  
Freedom Road Socialist Organization  
Gender Justice Working Group  
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance  
International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network  
Jubilee USA Network  
League of Revolutionaries for a New America  
May First/People Link  
Michigan Welfare Rights Organization  
Move To Amend Coalition  
People Organized to Win Employment Rights  
People's Institute for Society and Beyond  
Peoples Movement Assembly Working Group  
Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign  
Poverty Working Group  
Project South  
Sociologists Without Borders  
U.S. Human Rights Network  
U.S. Solidarity Economy Network  
Women of Color United  
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

***Question A: What impact did the USSF process have on your organization or sector, or on organization's you affiliate with that develop and/or support social movement building? What relationships did you develop that support your work, sector or the building of our social movement?***

**Center for Media Justice (CMJ)**

Across the country, organizing groups are both deepening base-building work and expanding alliance development to achieve broader impact. The US Social Forums in 2007 and 2010 helped to set this stage, by fostering deeper organizing strategies (e.g. transformative organizing) and birthing new alliances (including MAG-Net, SxSW, and NDWA).

Now many of these groups have won (or are poised to win) significant policy victories. Others are leading sophisticated leadership-development, collective action, and movement-building work. All are critical to transforming our society, both during the current economic transition and realignment, and for the longhaul. As these organizing and alliance-building efforts are growing, the communications work designed to support these efforts is set to grow as well.

During the 2010 USSF in Detroit, the Center for Media Justice, the Praxis Project, smartMeme, Progressive Communicators Network, Media Action Grassroots Network, the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance<sup>1</sup>, and many USSF participant groups began conversations about building movement communications infrastructure. These conversations yielded a broader understanding that it was not just infrastructure that was needed, but an answer to the bigger question: what exactly do we need to communicate beyond business as usual?

In 2011, the Center for Media Justice and the Praxis Project launched the Echo Justice Initiative to address this need. Echo brought alliance leaders together with smartMeme, PCN the Miami Workers Center, and the Movement Strategy Center to form a core of movement communicators with the skills, experience, and credibility necessary to grow relevant communications approaches integrated with organizing and movement building.

Echo Justice Initiative's first collaborative project was the October 2011 convening in Washington D.C. Hosted by Praxis, this convening was an example of the new space Echo is trying to create: space for organizers, communicators, and funder allies to forge strategies together that will build the influence of justice sectors to shape meaning and contest for power.

<sup>1</sup>*A Movement Agenda for Narrative Power: USSF People's Movement Assembly*  
(<http://www.scribd.com/doc/33970728/A-Movement-Agenda-for-Narrative-Power-USSF-PMA>)

### **East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC)**

The USSF had a tremendous impact on each aspect mentioned in the question. In regards to our organization, the USSF provide opportunities to further develop and strengthen staff leadership; participate in global networks (i.e., we are now a member of GGJ and have traveled to Cancun and Durban, leadership in D2D delegation); collaborate with other justice-oriented organizations around the country on various projects (i.e., Project South, SWOP); coordinate a well attended and engaging Detroit PMA; support and be a central figure in the creation of the Commons; and support the Up South Down South efforts.

### **Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO)/Organización Socialista del Camino para la Libertad (OSCL)**

We believe that participating inside and outside the USSF process was critical for our members and key contacts that were mobilized to attend. Relationships were strengthened and new ones were formed on political and personal levels. At the same time, the involvement in the USSF process was a huge investment of time and resources, both human and material. It became a point of contention between commitment and political capacity. Our work had to be re-prioritized and our members re-deployed in ways that impacted us. Some of our members felt the involvement was excessive, while others felt that it was important for us, along with dozens of other US organizations to make a significant investment.

### **Gender Justice Working Group (GJWG), submitted by Women of Color United (WCU)**

The USSF brought to home the lack of a national gender justice movement and the further work needed to integrate a gender justice framework into social movement building. Organizations and sectors that support gender justice had the goals of creating affirming, inclusive space for people of all gender identities at the USSF, facilitating and encouraging conversations about the various aspects of gender justice, and to encourage people to include a gender analysis in their workshops, plenaries, and events. Additionally, the gender justice working group was also interested in building connections and interactions among groups, organizations, and individuals focused on feminism, gender justice, reproductive rights, folks who are marginalized due to gender including women, transgender and genderqueer and those who are marginalized due to their sexual orientation. However, we found that a large part of our work and our primary

focus was engendering an intersectional and gendered analysis to the US Social Forum process.

The most positive aspect was working with other members in the group, many who had met face to face in October 2009. What was significant was our approach and struggle around pursuing gender justice in the US Forum context. Many decidedly skipped the word "feminism" and opted for "gender justice" to represent the broader approach to social inequalities that intersect and which global capitalism and neoliberalism are reliant upon.

Unfortunately, this approach seemed to have limited impact on the larger frame of the US Social Forum. This was indicated not only in our own experiences as part of the gender justice group but in the Gender Justice PMA by many who had been part of the organizing process. In particular an activist from Ecuador remarked on the lack of feminists consciousness and even the work feminism in the US Social Forum space. Younger activists from Texas were also upset with the credit men activists were taking for their hard grassroots work. The vast majority who attended the PMA were women, showing the ghettoization of gender issues.

### **International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN)**

The situation with Stand With Us was a huge learning experience around the role that Zionists will try to play in dividing our movements. It showed how important it is that people on the NPC have an understanding of what Zionism is, its impact on diverse movements and communities in the US, and of Zionist tactics in co-opting the language of liberatory politics to confuse political movements about its role in the world and to isolate the Palestinian struggle from other anti-racist, human and civil rights, and anti-war efforts.

IJAN and USPCN were involved in organizing a national meeting for those organizing campaigns in response to the Palestinian call for Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) against Israel launched a national network. Since the 2010 USSF, regional BDS meetings have been held across the country. The network has been used for collaboration, promotion of campaigns and defense against backlash. In 2012, there are plans for a national convening of BDS activists. We may use the PMA process to build a common national agenda and priorities.

Held in the days leading up to the USSF, the 2010 Assembly for Jews Confronting Racism and Israeli Apartheid was a critical organizing opportunity for IJAN and for the

anti-Zionist Jewish sector. 200 people attended. We were encouraged by participation not only from an intergenerational sector of anti-Zionist Jews but by the support we received from our partners – the United States Palestinian Community Network, (USPCN), the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diaspora Initiative at SF State, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM), Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA), Global Women's Strike (GWS), and other movement people.

Both the 2010 Assembly and the USSF were an important opportunity for our organizers to gather from across the country – many of us met each other for the first time. It played a very important role in building our relationship with one another and our organization. More generally, many of our members reported that both the Assembly and the USSF gave people a sense of what national organizing as part of national movement building could look like and, more important, a feeling that it was possible.

### **Jubilee USA Network**

The United States Social Forum had a great impact on the work that Jubilee USA Network, particularly in our grassroots movement building. Through the social forum we were able to establish deep ties with other faith based organizations, as well as keep a large amount of people engaged in Jubilee's issues of debt cancellation and global IFI accountability and transformation. Additionally, our organization was able to participate in the World Social Forum in Dakar, where we launched a new coalition of Diffuse the Debt Crisis. We also attended the South African Social Forum. In doing so we were able to deepen connections between the Global Jubilee movement.

### **MayFirst/People Link (MF/PL)**

The impact of the USSF process on May First/People Link was inestimable. We greatly enhanced our network, recruited a score of new members, and broadened the discussion of and our response to the political issues related to an open Internet, which we consider important. Our work at USSF drove our entry into World Social Forum work which links to our other International work and enormously raised our profile within progressive movements world-wide, but especially here in the United States.

Among the most important outcomes was the many relationships we developed on the NPC and its related work groups. These relationships draw the map for a lot of the work MF/PL is doing currently. Additionally, the experience allowed us to broaden and strengthen our own technologist-led support team, which is fundamental to meeting the ongoing needs of our membership.

The USSF was an opportunity for the progressive movement to engage with communications and technology issues head-on, through praxis. The impact of the

USSF process on strategic, movement-building approaches to Internet technology has shifted the national discussion about the use of digital communications to one based in political vision. MF/PL changed its own thinking around these discussions, too.

### **Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO)**

Since the USSF was housed in Detroit, MI in 2010, we have perhaps a keener point of view emanating from the focus of the work performed by Welfare Rights members who were totally engaged in the process. The impact has been consequential in several areas relative to movement building. Conversations were started that involved political analysis from a class perspective marking a departure from familiar ideological fronts of struggle that has usually been prevalent. The foundation for forming new alliances has been the outcome of this qualitative change. Subsequent talks with different groups have formed the basis of deeper organizing which has been halted to a great degree by the arrival of Occupy: Detroit. Smaller, more internal efforts to develop a common assessment of economic and political conditions were made easier because the talks started with class discussions, so to a degree, Welfare Rights was able to recruit deeper thinkers and to form alliances with groups who shared our point of view which has moved the process. The down side has been the inability to move closer to the actual Anchor groups which suffered after the Social Forum ended. Centro Obrero experienced the greatest rift and was almost totally dismantled. Welfare Rights suffered physical losses as the space was damaged which required monetary repairs and spiritual repairs also. EMEAC needed to “re-boot”, and recently secured new space to continue their work. Jobs With Justice drifted completely away, leaving little or no relationship with the local Anchor rep’s. Again, the arrival of the Occupy-Detroit has so many great possibilities – some tied to the Social Forum, and many more that are independent of same.

### **Move To Amend (MTA) Coalition**

The Move To Amend coalition (MTA) is mostly white, with a leadership committed to incorporating an anti-oppression analysis into our organizing work. Mobilizing our base to attend the USSF provided many of them with the opportunity to experience what is possible when people of color and low-income communities lead a social movement. Quite bluntly, it helped to inspire and to radicalize our membership who attended,

MTA created a PMA process at the USSF to engage folks in the idea that we must amend the US Constitution to abolish corporate personhood and to establish that money is not political speech.

Addressing corporate personhood and establishing that money is not political speech is MTA's initial demand for amending the constitution. We are building a movement of local leaders that are learning that the process of creating a meaningful "Law of the Land" just begins here. We have a commitment to generate additional amendments and approaches alongside leaders and communities of color.

The process of creating—then facilitating—the PMA process was incredibly helpful to us in developing materials and internal skills to introduce folks to the notion that it is possible to imagine how a new "Supreme Law" could be created and what it would look like.

### **People Organized To Win Employment Rights (POWER)**

The USSF process has had an important impact on our organization and our sector, as well as organizations that we affiliate with that develop and/or support movement building. For POWER, the USSF has served as a site for social movement convergence—to both create convergence and participate in convergence. For example, historically, the USSF has been the site for the formation of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) and the Right to the City Alliance (RTTC), two alliances that POWER has both participated in since its inception and played leadership roles within for the last five years. The USSF 2007 was the site of a Black Left convergence that brought together organizations and individuals rooted in Black radical traditions and practice to discuss what's necessary to resurrect a vibrant Black Left in the United States. The USSF has allowed us to participate in important dialogues and debates about alternatives to capitalism, transformative organizing, food democracy, workers rights, and has served as an essential intergenerational space. Over the span of the USSF (2007 and 2010), we have seen organizations in our sector that tend to concentrate on local struggles participate in a way that both broadens their understanding and exposure to social movements, and has strengthened their work by joining forces with other organizations with similar goals. Tools, skills, practice and analysis that has been shared at the USSF has been brought back to our organization and adapted to fit our context. Through the USSF, we have also been able to learn about the context of social movement struggle in various locations. Our exposure to social movement conditions in Atlanta in 2007 and then Detroit in 2010 have inspired our work and our leaders to continue to build the other world that all of us know is possible.

**People's Institute for Society and Beyond (PISAB) - Greater New Orleans Organizers Roundtable (GNOOR)**

Yvette Theirre (Safe Street Strong Communities) "...Being there let me know that I am not alone; there were so many sessions to try and get to; It causes me to see our National Movement and how we can strengthen it."

Norris Henderson (Voice of the Ex-Offender) "I have been playing this thing in my head about impact. One of the biggest impacts was the young folks; in their own space taking care of business; all of the self organized sessions including the \$1.00 lunch. The best lunch I had the whole time there. I don't know how they did it. There were so many youth there even the number of youth with us. Seeing the Overcomers as a group moving around and taking care of business."

Ayeesha - "An exercise in Freedom is what The USSF is about. Trying to figure things out. With all of the imperfections we keep on moving."

Roger 'Knowledge' Youngblood (Souls of Freedom) "First I want to compare it to USSF 2007. There I found myself reacting to the space. This year I became more proactive. Got a chance to build with folks that don't always have the time at home. The March and the energy we brought to the March impacted the whole thing. The workshop we did Lets Get It was attended by youth from all over the country and we networked and made connections. I am getting emails from people looking to get us to come to their city."

Rajah (Voice of the Ex-Offender) - I travel a lot. I am from California and consider myself a life long learner. I like to learn from other people and cultures. New to activism and organizing and felt the love in Detroit and feel it even more in New Orleans.

Alex Bernadett (Tulane University) - "Connecting groups and community organizers within regions in addition to having a forum to share experiences, successes, and challenges has helped connect people to larger movements and initiatives."

Andrea Slocum (Critical Resistance) - "I believe that the biggest impact that the USSF has had has been local. At both USSF's, I have felt that we, as New Orleans and we, as the Gulf south, have come together to organize, mobilize and build during both occasions."

Ernest Johnson (Families&Friends of LA Incarcerated Kids) "The bus ride was exhausting, exciting and people were intoxicated. After getting there I realized that the



bus ride was not so bad. The African American Museum gave inspiration it told it ALL. The whole story of the USSF and all the sessions, from Cobo Hall to the bus ride.” Derek Rankins (People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond / Students Organizing Against Racism) - “The impact of the USSF in building new movement relationships and initiatives is greater than we can ever dream one because our work crosses borders that most of us often forget. We know it’s there because we would not be looking at such a ready to respond nation otherwise.”

### **Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC)**

The impact of the Social Forum for PPEHRC was a little bit like going through labor where everybody involved in the Social Forum process came out to be a different person. Some were committed leaders who were reborn – baptized in that process – but there were others who were burned out and angry but then went on to be supportive members and to help and create and support other Social Forum work. It also allowed other members to emerge within PPEHRC. Social Forums like that are always really good boot camps to have people figure out themselves and their relationships to a larger social process. And we think depending on the different stage of development that they’re at that they either step off for a while or they further consolidate it. So we use the term like labor because it’s a horrible process but it’s still a memorable one – it’s a marking, a milestone.

For members within PPEHRC there were people who came out of that process who are now working 24/7 helping PPEHRC and that wouldn’t have happened without the SF process. In the larger movement building piece, the grass is always greener on the other side as opposed to where you’ve dropped your buckets organizationally, but then when people throw buckets in some place else they realize it’s hard everywhere.

### **Poverty Working Group (PWG)**

The USSF process made it possible for hundreds of representatives of organizations working to end poverty to come together, analyze and explore our many varied approaches, and unite in common cause. During the multi-session Poverty Summit, using the PMA process, we consolidated our relationships and passed a resolution creating the Assembly to End Poverty, which is now a formal organization with its own co-chairs (Monica Beemer and Marian Kramer) and steering committee.

In a related development, those participants in the Poverty Summit who work on housing issues created, with other housing rights activists, another formal organization,

the USA-Canada Alliance during another PMA session. Together, these collaborating national organizations (bi-national, in the case of USACAI) unite approximately 40 organizations, nearly all led by and/or directly accountable to people living in poverty. This report will focus primarily on the work of The Assembly as the direct and formal outgrowth of the PWG's Poverty Summit; however, we wish to note the collaborative relationship and overlapping membership of the two organizations. (USACAI will apply for NPC status when applications next open.)

Representatives of over 20 groups attended a founders' meeting in Chicago in December 2010, and then a program planning meeting in Detroit in June 2011. During the March meetings, we inaugurated our "One Class-One Cause" campaign; with a June 2012 March to Washington a key element of the campaign. Another key element of the campaign is the PMA (People's Movement Assembly) process. We expect to organize "Poverty PMAs" around the country in the upcoming year.

Given the results of the structural changes in the economic base that have peaked in the last decade, we believe that it is necessary to intensify efforts but also to organize beyond the traditional boundaries of "welfare rights" to include the new class of dispossessed. Even the mainstream media widely report the exponential rise in poverty, evictions, and homelessness; the final shredding of the safety net; and the "need" for the imposition of "emergency financial managers" that overrule democratically elected representatives and the democratic process itself. The prevailing explanation, however, is that our "sacrifices" and "economic recovery" will bring change for the better in these conditions. But our understanding of the structural transformation—and the message of our campaign—is that the jobs being lost are gone for good, that the "emergency" managers are agents of the evolving fascist state, and that by uniting and pressing our agenda politically, we can claim the abundance produced in the electronic age and democratically distribute it.

Thus, we intend not only to end poverty, but to end the threat of poverty. That is the mission of The Assembly. The USSF process made it possible for us to articulate this mission and to unite our (sometimes disparate and competing) groups to accomplish it.

Given the energy and nature of the Occupy (OWS) movement, virtually all of our Steering Committee and Campaign members are involved at some level in that work. At our upcoming January face-to-face meeting, and following extensive discussions during our weekly calls, we will re-assess our campaign's plan for the march to Washington. We are considering regionally-based alternatives as well as the many possible ways of relating to and advancing our work within the OWS movement.

## **Project South (PS)**

[Response for Questions A & C]

Movements need convergence in order to increase the scale of work and impact. The U.S. Social Forum planning process and convergence space has contributed to the growth of social movement power in the U.S. The Peoples Movement Assemblies offer constructive spaces to practice community governance and to coordinate across multiple strategies and multiple geographies.

The emergence of the Social Forum process in the United States represents a break with old dynamics and dichotomies. Ideologies are being reconsidered. New challenges are being exposed, including displacement, economic destabilization, and recolonization. Collective understandings of intersectionality are debated and synthesized into comprehensive fronts of struggle.

In practical terms, the Social Forum process provides space for thousands of people to share and receive political education. Communication infrastructure is tested to determine innovations in data sharing, logistics, planning, and resource sharing. Entry points are increased to include people who are searching for political homes and ways to be involved in their communities. Organizers are invited to design and practice infrastructural systems to take care of basic needs, health, wellness, language diversity, cultural expression, transportation, and lodging in innovative ways.

Politically, the Forum and Movement Assemblies create clear opportunities for movement actors to develop coordinated political direction and shared strategies based in collective assessment of opportunities and conditions. If we build the process well, we can continue deepening levels of political integration that include organized movement formations, alliances, and united fronts. The process is also a training ground for new generations of leadership. Organizers and leaders are developed through the process and are capable of larger scale work, reflecting, in practice and strategy, the analysis, relationships and innovations cultivated throughout the Social Forum process.

### **Additional opportunities of the Social Forum include:**

- converge social forces working on frontlines of neoliberal attacks and creating alternatives from a shared vision of justice
- build coordinated movement activity across the US in local and regional spaces
- de-center the geographic focus on the coasts and develop more nuanced analysis of breadth of regional histories, differences, and possibilities

- practice democratic, self-determined & structured spaces for masses of people
- connect to global struggles through building intentional alliances
- integrate young people and share the best of intergenerational practices

### **Sociologists Without Borders (SWB)/Sociologistas Sin Fronteras (SSF)**

The USSF provided a **focal point** that helped us draw members' attention to the work being done by movements across the United States and by movements around the world. It also provided some clearly defined ways **in which our members and their students could become involved in social movements** for large-scale social change.

### **U.S. Human Rights Network (USHRN)**

The 2010 Social Forum provided the US Human Rights Network with a means to introduce a broader sector of the progressive social movement in the US to the human rights framework. The Social Forum allowed our members to engage a broader range of progressive organizations and networks, and it introduced a greater number of our members to the People's Assembly process, which we intend on engaging in a critical manner as part of our strategic operations in the future.

### **U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (USSEN)**

The last USSF, and the process building up to up to it, helped USSEN considerably in being able to link with and meet up with our affiliates, liked-minded organizations and interested individuals. We sponsored a 'track' of over 100 workshops, plus helped lead one of the People's Movement Assemblies. We also shared a book table with one of our allied groups and had a national SEN leadership meeting during the USSF gathering. All of this helped to sustain us over the next period, up to the present, and helped launch or strengthen a few new projects, such as our Solidarity Economy mapping and economic integration initiative. We appreciated the heartening and revitalizing re-charge that SEN got out of the USSF experience.

Counterbalancing all this great stuff, is the fact that it took a considerable investment of energy, as well as a moderate financial commitment.

## **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)**

WILPF is an organization that fits naturally into the Social Forum environment, and like USSF, we are a multi-issue organization committed to peace and freedom. For the 2007 USSF in Atlanta, WILPF members were involved in all levels of planning, and organized a robust program, with four workshops of our own (on different topics) and 8 workshops done in collaboration with partner organizations. We had a large delegation (40 members) who stayed at the same hotel and gathered daily for briefings over breakfast.

At the 2010, USSF in Detroit, WILPF was also pleased to bring a broad contingent of members and were able to participate in a number of forums and make new connections with organizations and activists pursuing similar goals. WILPF members presented and collaborated on several workshops, including “End the War Economy! Develop an Economy for Peace!,” “Our Democratic Right to Safe Water and Health,” and “Why Women? Why Cuba? Building a Women's Movement for Cuba.” We also formed and strengthened our relationships with organizations like the U.S. Human Rights Network, the Detroit People's Water Board, and several individuals who shared lessons learned from their experiences during Hurricane Katrina.

The 2010 USSF in particular seemed to be a manifestation of a generational shift in movement-building. Because of the substantial youth presence, the Forum felt like an “organizing school” – an oasis of sorts, where young activists could learn about both process and content. Youth are more fluid in their identities and, perhaps, more open to new alliances and the youthfulness of the 2010 USSF may have been one reason why reciprocity or mutuality seemed more prominent than competition. Or, maybe because this was the second USSF, the program, time slots and spaces was better organized. Overall, the workshops spaces were inviting, friendly, and encouraged inclusivity. For example, the PMA for Gay, Lesbian, Bi and Transgendered people made use of some best-practices and some innovative tools for group facilitation to support the multiplicity of voices present and really begin to formulate a practical agenda. It has thrilling to see the diffusion of the PMA process (ways of being and interacting, social norms of co-responsibility and active listening, values of zero waste and aesthetic expression) throughout the many OWS encampments this fall. A four hour workshop offered by Generation Five drew an overflow crowd, of whom maybe five were over thirty-five (no one else was anywhere near the more advanced ages of WILPF women) and created a “safe space” to remember and acknowledge childhood sexual abuse and experiment with somatics as a means of maintaining interpersonal connectivity through conflict or fear. That these sorts of inclusive activities could not only take place, but be wildly popular says much about the overall vibe and to the future of the Social Forum as a forum for sharing both organizing know-how and issue research.

Another particularly inspiring workshop was presented by several young people who had survived hurricane Katrina - which forced them to re-think some basic premises of middle class life. The theme of the workshop was “you can’t eat money” and the presenters shared both their rejection of debt (think mortgages, think student loans) and their strategies for creating a good life outside the monetary system. While the growth of the non-profit sector in the 1980s and 90s created a myriad of professional roles for social movement activists to slip into, this model may not be sustainable. We need to nurture a generation of competent amateurs, able to slip instead into the cracks in a declining economy and spring from it an ever fuller realization of human rights and dignity. This generation must be educated outside the formal institutions of education, which are currently priced out of reach for anyone unwilling to mortgage their future freedoms as the price of entry. This is where the social forum, a do-it-yourself school for all ages, has a vital role to play.

The WILPF Board President was a presenter at one workshop entitled “*Sisters Across Borders: Advancing U.S. Women’s rights through Global Feminism*,” that was attended by about 100 people - who appeared to listen attentively to what was being shared. To the presenters, it felt that that the older generation was respected for what content and technique they had to offer. The material shared was also important information, as it is hard to remember that feminists, or even non-feminist activist women under forty, often do not realize that the US never passed the ERA! For more established activists, it is critical we continue to refocus and refresh so that the information we pass on is the key information, and that we don’t wander off into the fine points of an argument that may be totally unfamiliar to our listeners. If we can do this, younger activists will be more interested, respectful, and energized by/energizing to our causes. The 2010 USSF left WILPF women feeling secure about passing the torch.

**Question B: *What is your organization's political assessment of this current historical moment, and do you see a role for the Social Forum process as a vehicle for supporting stronger social movement building, including grassroots organizing?***

**East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC)**

The political, economic and social crises that are taking place in this country and around the world reflect a fundamental shift that has taken place in the relationship between labor and technology. As a result, people have been and continue to be permanently pushed out of the workforce. And knowing this clarifies other changes taking place in society: The closing of schools and hospitals; the reduction or elimination of public services; throwing people out of their homes, off welfare, and on the street...all of these are connected with the permanent displacement of workers. In addition, this new relationship between labor and technology means that the conditions are now ripe for fundamental societal change. When people are working, when their needs are being met, they are not motivated to struggle for change because they are benefiting in one way or another from existing arrangements and structures. So knowing the moment we are in can bring clarity on what we ought to do to solve/resolve the problems associated with permanent displacement.

One other factor is the resurgence of the Republican Party/Tea Party and their audacity to advance the corporate/anti-democratic, some would say fascist, agenda. Examples include: Obama has recently (2011) given orders to successfully assassinate US citizens for their role in terrorist organizations; Congress is considering bills that would suspend habeas corpus in the US and give the military ability to detain US citizens for terrorism related suspicions with no civil/judicial trial. In Michigan we are seeing an amazing, unprecedented attack on public education; slashing education spending; outsourcing public teachers and various school-related staff; curbing collective-bargaining rights; limiting and vilifying teachers' unions; and lastly to increasing charter and "cyber" schools. With the latter, these schools are not only siphoning away funding for public schools, the entire process is being portrayed as a victory for educational justice. In Michigan, the struggle over public education is closely linked with the struggle for democratic governance via Emergency Managers. These highly political, extremely corporate, technocratic, appointed positions have the designated ability to overrule any elected official. Almost every major city with a Black majority is slated for an EM appointed by the Republican governor (they were no better when appointed by the Democrat). All of this is not to say "Woe is us" but rather to point out these local trends with national implications. We know what is happening in Michigan but have little

idea of the extent to which these trends are impacting community governing in other regions. A social forum process, in conjunction with PMA processes can help us gain this understanding. We saw with the Arizona immigration laws the ability to magnify local struggles and show national solidarity. We need to increase our capacity for such actions in this period.

Having stated this, the question is what role the USSF process can or should play given these realities? The social forum process can play an important role in providing space for participants and leaders in various movements to connect, collaborate, share information, and engage in other potentially unifying efforts. Given people's responses to the economic crises - protests, occupy efforts, etc. - it would seem appropriate to coordinate a social forum. However given people's economic realities, which leave many unemployed and struggling, it may not be feasible to have a single forum, but rather regional PMA's.

### **Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO)/Organización Socialista del Camino para la Libertad (OSCL)**

There are two parts of this question and we will answer the former as FRSO is in the process of discussing the current historical moment within the organization.

Our members felt that having a space for lots of ideas, people and politics is important, i.e. the Big Tent. The fact that the Social Forum significantly grew in numbers from the 2007 gathering to the 2010 showed that many saw the utility of coming together beyond their own organizational interests (i.e. a workshop, setting up vendor booth, etc.)

As part of our recent discussion about the NPC questions, Freedom Road wondered if the Wisconsin Revolt or the Occupy Movement would have happened without the Social Forum. We believe that the Forum had an impact, and at the same time feel that it's difficult to measure the how and where. This brings us to the general goals of the USSF.

The goals of the 2010 USSF were to:

- Create a space for social movement convergence and strategic discussion.
- Advance social movements agenda for action and transformation.
- Build stronger relationships and collaboration between movements.
- Deepen our commitment to international solidarity and common struggle.
- Strengthen local capacity to improve social conditions, organizing and movement building in Detroit.



The only goal above that we can say with some certainty was achieved is the space was created for social movement convergence and strategic discussion. It is not too late to back fill what we now know was accomplished and we think it would be useful and healthy for the movements. The Forum's impact on Detroit should be delineated and the local committee must be articulated as part of the narrative but also as a selling point for future host cities.

For future social forums, the NPC must further define the goals with some measurable outcomes. Otherwise, how do we know if we successfully achieved the goal? Goals 2-4 could have used more specificity in terms of such tangible outcomes so that the NPC, along with its participating allies, could be more intentional about the process.

The concrete ways to achieve #2 could have been the PMAs reach consensus on one or two campaigns, projects or issues. By putting the energy of the PMAs toward a focal point, the impact on a particular issue could be better quantified. Hypothetic: Ecological PMA demanded due diligence by the US on the Kyoto Protocol. As a result, the US produced a report showing encouraging progress on the elimination of greenhouse emissions.

Regarding #3, of course we want to build relationships and collaborations between movements. What would that look like? How would those movements function differently as a result of those new or strengthened relationships? What impact could they have on the material conditions of the 99 percenters? Did the partnership change the public discourse around a particular issue?

FRSO believes that the USSF can still be the convergence of many flowering thoughts but we also need to better utilize and focus the expertise, energy and resources that the Forum harnesses for a few days every three years.

### **Gender Justice Working Group (GJWG), submitted by Women of Color United (WCU)**

We have been in a time with limited intersectional analyses in social movements. Many groups and organizations have focused on singular issues without taking into account differential impacts of and intersections of power and privilege. The gender analysis that was attempted to put forth pushed for the understanding and identifying the ways in which gender interacts and intersects with various forms of oppression, including race,

class, sexual orientation, immigration, etc. and that people's experiences are defined by the intersection of these oppressions.

The loss or subjugation of gender issues to what some consider the larger or the bigger struggle or the issue that can build more linkages is an old story and never leads to broad social justice and continues to empower neoliberalism. The centrality to gender in US imperial campaigns, in militarism, in labor, in ecological disaster, needs to finally be highlighted by the US Social Forum, this will create a stronger more vibrant movement in which participants can acknowledge and build across the numerous inequalities they experience.

Yet, recent "occupy" movements have also been examples of people attempting to develop analyses of current economic and social realities and their differential impact on multiple communities. See Af3rm's analysis which addresses gender, race, class from an intersectional analysis. For their full work view:

<http://www.af3irm.org/2011/11/wall-street-violence-against-women-dismantle-it>

Highlights:

*"The Crimes of Wall Street:"*

Women continue to suffer huge income disparity under the patriarchal system of gender and race discrimination. White women workers earn only \$0.77 to every dollar a white male worker makes; black women, \$0.64 and Latinas, \$0.52. This wage discrepancy leads to a loss of \$300,000 to a woman worker over her work life.

Women constitute 64% of minimum wage workers in the US. Single mothers of color are the hardest hit in the current mortgage crisis, because banks had targeted communities of color for high cost subprime. 35% of current subprime loans actually qualify for lower-interest prime loans, which would have saved many homes from foreclosure.

Women are both consumers and commodity in corporate culture, urged to shop even as images of women are used to sell products, from electronics to beer. Women's bodies are the main merchandise of both the sex and labor trafficking markets.

Multinational corporations derive 68% of their global profits from women workers who are paid the equivalent of \$2 a day while creating products sold for hundreds of dollars in the US and European markets: electronics, garments, toys. In labor camps stretching from Honduras to Mexico to Cambodia to the Philippines, these corporations, whose stocks are traded on Wall Street, defy labor laws and anti-pollution laws. They take out

100% of their profits from the underdeveloped countries, creating economic catastrophes. Some of these corporations ignore sexual harassment and the victimization of women workers; some sterilize women workers to save on maternity benefits and to keep plants running 24/7.”

### **Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ) Alliance**

Global politics have become very polarized. Rightwing parties won significant political victories throughout Europe last year. Their agendas include cutting public spending, persecuting immigrants and privatization of services: Austerity, xenophobia and privatization. In Austria the fascist Freedom Party won 29% of the vote. The European Union is on the brink of crises that started in Greece and has rippled into the eurozone. This is having an impact on the global financial system. Several Left governments throughout Latin America have developed important innovations in democracy, immigration and economic policy – offering hope for providing alternative models to capitalism. However, contradictions exist and tensions are developing between social movements and political leaders – most notably Evo Morales over his support of a road project through indigenous lands and a national park.

The Arab revolutions defined global politics in the early part of this year. Popular mobilizations in several countries overthrew authoritarian regimes and now are heading into the second phase of their struggles, like in Egypt in several weeks ago in their uprising against military rule. Up to this point, however, it is not totally clear how the movements will consolidate democratic power. The Arab movements inspired mobilizations worldwide, including the Indignados movement in Spain and the Occupy Together movement in the United States.

In the United States things have turned around quite a bit since last year. It feels that there are a range of forces-that are in motion or about to be. The most visible is the 99% movement, with occupations in hundreds of cities throughout the country. Although this is largely a white, anti-authoritarian movement, other sectors and movements are building relationships with it. The Rebuild the Dream initiative includes various national organizations like the Sierra Club, the NAACP, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and others, and then additionally some of the grassroots organizing formations like Jobs with Justice (JwJ) and the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA). The initiative is attempting to appeal to the white, middle and working class base using patriotic themes, but it does have an emphasis on movement building. The New Bottom Line is a formation rooted in Alinsky organizing that includes PICO National Network,

National Peoples Action, Alliance for a Just Society and others are focusing on corporate accountability of financial institutions.

UNITY, an alliance of alliances (formerly known as the Inter-Alliance Dialogue: IAD) is advancing important initiatives in the emerging Excluded Workers sector which includes workers that are not covered under U.S. labor laws. It is a movement largely of immigrants and people of color but is doing innovative organizing work within labor. This comes at an important time as the Right is launching a massive nationwide assault to break the unions in the public sector as in Wisconsin and many other state battles to protect collective bargaining and the private sector like Verizon – where the company seeks to roll back 73 items in the existing union contract of one of the largest private sector unions.

Our organizations are increasingly sharing their methodologies and programs so that they can each add value to one another, build inter-racial understanding and unity, and engage in long-range collaborative efforts. The South by Southwest Experiment partnership of SouthWest Organizing Project, Southwest Workers Union and Southern Echo is an important trend in regional organizing model.

JwJ and NDWA also launched the Caring Across Generations Campaign earlier this year that will create 2 million jobs with higher standards in the care sector for the aging baby boomer generation. It will also create career opportunities and training to the growing people of color population working in the care sector. Right to the City Alliance has launched a new initiative for 21<sup>st</sup> Century cities that will redefine how cities are built in just and sustainable ways. Grassroots Global Justice Alliance (GGJ) has launched a new effort: No War, No Warming, Build an Economy for People and the Planet, and joining the New Priorities Network demanding moving resources from military spending to social needs as well as the network of groups organizing to close military bases. GGJ will also continue to work on climate justice issues, making connections to local organizing and the international climate justice movement, and defining our demands, principles and vision for an economy based on human rights and the rights of nature. GGJ members and allies are organizing local Assemblies, convening people throughout the country to define broad, community agendas and platforms.

There are 2 defining characteristics of the Unity (alliance of alliances) movements:

- 1) They represent a consolidation of forces nationally that has not been able to come together in the first three years of the recent economic crisis.
- 2) These formations are not single issue – although they may have a particular issue focus, there are broader platforms that bring them together. A semblance of platforms are being developed in the Occupy Together movement. Rebuild the

Dream has a 10 point platform. The New Priorities Network has a four point platform. UNITY is a strategic alliance working on multiple fronts and developing demands in the areas of immigrant rights, excluded workers, urban development, war and militarism and climate. GGJ is initiating an effort to define a platform and vision for the economy based on the demands of members and allies.

These developments offer possibilities for coordination and broader fronts of struggle over the next year. Over the past decade there have been several key movement mobilizations on a national scale: the 2003 worldwide protests against the invasion of Afghanistan, the 2006 immigrant rights marches, the 2008 voter mobilization to elect President Obama, and the 2011 Wisconsin and Midwest protests by public sector workers. In each of these instances mobilizations never transitioned into sustained movement building.

There are a couple of key factors that may make this movement moment different:

- 1) *The crisis of capitalism continues to get worse and many predict a double-dip recession in the near future.* -The longer that people remain unemployed and social needs are unfunded the more that attention turns to Wall Street and increasingly the enormous cost of the war machine.
- 2) *Beltway strategies failed* - from healthcare to immigration reform to climate policy to cutting military spending and more, liberal and progressive policies were compromised into a painful death by the Obama administration or soundly defeated in Congress. National organizations recognize that the legislative strategy failed and in the meantime the right was building a well funded and decentralized grassroots movement that won a significant amount of Congressional seats in 2010. There has also been a demobilization of the social forces who put Obama in office.
- 3) *The multi-issue agendas of the movements* – this allows for longer term, a more holistic approach to demand creation and unity building, and strategic relationships to be built.
- 4) *The increasing success that our organizations are having in building an inter-generational infrastructure* – over the past 30 years we have developed mechanisms both for incorporating youth on a daily basis into the work. Increasingly, we are developing the capacity and wherewithal for developing real youth leadership that transcends the generational divides that we have historically faced. This is crucial to our work right now.

The USSF can be very useful in this moment in bringing together all of these forces. This paper assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the USSF process, along with the opportunities and challenges facing the future of the process.

## **International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN)**

The Occupy Wall Street movement presents an opportunity and a useful challenge to our movements. The unexpected popular movement for economic justice, housing rights, access to higher education, basic education, as well as explicit anti-capitalist demands and impulses, are something many of us didn't expect to see in the US in our lifetimes. There is less but some attention on the role of the US in relationship to the rest of the world – anyone who makes \$34,000 or more is in the top 1% internationally and the US supports the 1% in most countries in the world.

The challenges are three-fold: 1) the discomfort and learning involved for many in the movement in relating to a popular movement that reflects so many of things that we struggle against – racism, sexism, class privilege, US-centricism, etc.; 2) prioritizing an unplanned popular movement amidst our under-resourced, unpaid, high demand organizing efforts; and 3) figuring out how to contribute to and influence this popular movement in a genuine and not simply a transactional way – going beyond trying to leverage it for organizational goals but instead support it as a critical anti-capitalist impulse – a nerve that's been hit and that is deeply relevant to our goals for a different world.

OWS means there is going to be new interest from many people about creating a broader movement. Internally to the “movement” this means a new group of people with less organizing experience, less ideological clarity and understanding of movement history- including mis-steps that have held movements back in the past.

The US Social Forum can be a place for training and networking – support increased clarity of analysis, demands, organizing methods, etc. but requires that we do things differently – in more popular ways that resonate for those being drawn to Occupy but, more importantly perhaps, all those who neither the USSF nor the Occupy movement have reached. This raises the question of the specific role of grassroots organizations in the US – not just mass, member-based but organizations that are directed by the interests and leadership of those most impacted by racism, capitalism and sexism.

One of the PMA's at the 2010 USSF focused on the Tar Sands Oil Pipeline. The defeat of this effort is a great blow to capitalism and environmental racism. The USSF can and should highlight and build upon the successes of our movements – during as well as in between social forums.

## **Jubilee USA Network**

The current political moment offers several opportunities for Jubilee USA Network. The debt crises in low income countries in the Global South has stifled the growth of many nations and indentured many developing nations' citizens to go without their basic needs due to their economic disenfranchisement. The current European debt crises, unemployment, poverty, and austerity measures across Europe and the United States is reflective of what nations in the Global South have experienced for decades. These issues are now at the forefront of people's minds locally. Furthermore, the emerging Occupy movement has given a voice to these issues. Jubilee USA along with the People's Movements Assemblies must continue to bring together a unifying vision of local and global economic justice to be used as a groundswell for continued grassroots organizing and movement building. We must continue to place the issues of debt and transformation of international financial institutions at the forefront of our local and global justice movement. These issues fundamentally intersect with a broad range of struggles which remain at the forefront – from Climate Justice and Climate Debt, to broader accountability with international and local banks and unjust lending practices.

## **League of Revolutionaries for a New America (LRNA)**

*The objective situation in the U.S. and the world is one of irreversible economic crisis and collapse, ecological and social destruction, and intensifying political attack and threat of fascism (repression and war). Movement development in this context is an urgent task, and the USSF can be a powerful tool in this process.*

We are experiencing a crisis of the entire global capitalist system and, thus, for all of its components and institutions. Systemic crisis exacerbates and exposes the ever starker contradictions of society – of great abundance on a global scale of all the things people require, but of great want, deprivation, exploitation, oppression, and dispossession. Vanishing jobs, plummeting wages, soaring poverty, a broken social contract and neoliberal policies, growing militarism and police repression, and ecological collapse are a daily reality for U.S. workers and the vast majority of the world's peoples.

Today shifts in the base of the capitalist economy – globalization and the technological revolution using electronic tools (computers, automation, robotics) that are labor replacing – have created a systemic rupture in capitalist relations and accumulation. Workers, increasingly replaced by robots, are becoming redundant and disposable. Huge and growing swathes of the working class are increasingly poor, underemployed

and unemployed, homeless, hungry, without quality education and health care, exposed to environmental toxins and disasters, and are confronting the police state. The corporate state has replaced the welfare state, and the threat of fascism looms large.

Movement development in this moment is an urgent task for many reasons, but especially because of the threat of fascism. If we do not build our movement solidly enough and quickly enough, that threat will become a reality. In 2001 the Patriot Act marked the beginning of this intensified period of domestic repression and linkage to the so-called “war on terror” and the formation of the Department of Homeland Security. This intensified the centuries long war on our communities at home and on peoples abroad – including African American incarceration and the prison industrial complex, (in)secure communities and massive attacks on immigrant communities destroying lives and families, the attack on women’s bodies and reproductive justice, and widespread attacks on free speech and the right to assemble, among others. And we have all witnessed the brutal police state attack on occupiers across the country.

It is also urgent because once things start to get into motion, they have a tendency to move very rapidly. So given the motion expressed in the occupy movement, it is critical that the those of us in the social forum process get a handle on it and see how to relate to it – how to broaden the movement and build relationships with it, and how to develop the consciousness of the larger movement.

### **MayFirst/People Link (MF/PL)**

We see the entire world going in an obvious forward motion and have always believed that the Internet is one manifestation of this forward motion; we see the Internet as a community or movement created by humanity. The economic crisis has bankrupted the social and political structures that run the world and has given humanity an ultimatum to either move forward or face greater crisis. War, blanketing much of the world, has proven completely incapable of improving the situation. All traditional institutions of governance, communications, and law have clearly defaulted and many are completely broken.

The human race is responding through several strategic reactions. At this point, the most visible are the proliferating popular demonstrations and “uprisings” (“revolutions” in the parlance of the participants). This forest fire of popular movements, reminiscent of the world-wide movement of youth struggle in 1968 - 1970, is an obvious first step in major and potentially tumultuous mass movements challenging the world's structures of power. There are other companion developments -- the axis of progressive



governments in Latin America, the Climate Change movement, the world-wide leadership of Indigenous peoples -- that precede these popular uprisings and, in the long term, may actually enter into coordination with them.

We are in a period when communication among movements is essential and that's what our organization is about.

### **Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO)**

Detroit continues to be the headquarters of economic decline and disaster in urban America, setting the pace for what corporations want to happen now that the economic structure has inextricably changed. Because technology has replaced so many hands, society must be restructured to suit what the new needs will be...Another World Is Possible is in full gallop. Given that political back-drop, the corporate class is tightening its grip on those resources it must have, so the misery indexes are rising daily marked by endless attacks on our collective quality of life. No one is safe or protected as system wide changes are being forced. That being said, the only vehicle possible to gather visionaries together to review our circumstances and arrive at a common assessment of these issues that is controlled by working class people, is the SF and the SF process. Welfare Rights can call for a national meeting which will represent a narrow component of working class people. All of the Anchor groups can make the same call, and the outcome would be the same. However, such a call from the USSF brings parties together on a different level that reflects a deeper and broader message that is tied to movement building. The SF is the recognized structure for such a message, and that was confirmed in Detroit, in 2010. Occupy participants are frequent visitors who request advice on grassroots organizing tactics because of the respect garnered within this process. Grassroots organizing events in Detroit have been enhanced by previous involvement with the SF process. We battle internal problems based in new recruits who cling to old forms of narrow struggles, but we generally find our way out when issues of class distinctions are raised that support the forming of new alliances.

### **Move To Amend (MTA) Coalition**

We believe the global economic crisis-- and the parallel ecological crisis created by it-- is the inevitable consequence of late-stage capitalism. Austerity budgets are imposing catastrophic cuts to social programs as the need for them continues to rise.

The crisis fall disproportionately on people of color and low-income people, and for the

first time in modern history the (mostly white) middle and upper middle class are being affected. Across the board people are losing confidence in the existing political and economic systems, and these systems are unable to address honestly (much less solve) the resulting economic inequities and environmental devastation.

These factors are creating volatile political instability and opportunity. The Tea Party represents the confused anguish of conservatives who blame “the government.” OWS seems to be mostly white and young progressive and liberal folks who blame “the corporations.” The USSF represents folks who have been on the front lines of social movements doing grassroots organizing for justice for decades.

### **People Organized To Win Employment Rights (POWER)**

The current historical moment has seen a deepening of the crises of empire, economy and ecology, as well as a broadening of uprisings and possibilities for the Left. Corporate personhood, the alarming rate of foreclosures and increasing criminalization of working class communities has gotten worse. The loss of civil liberties has deepened. More people have been deported under Obama as under any US president. Increasingly, we are seeing public services disappear, or else it's accessed for a price. The public sector is under attack and the union movement is still struggling to figure out its place in this moment in history. The recent talks in Durban demonstrated (again) that there is no serious attempt to curb carbon emissions, and that instead, the United States and other First World countries will continue to do business as usual, thinking that it can use science and technology to save us from the cliff we're headed toward. Indeed, this historical moment is showing real fissures in capitalism, and the lack of willingness to change course, or to really acknowledge that anything is wrong.

This has created popular response beyond what we've seen in the last three decades. The Arab Spring that spread like wildfire across North Africa saw widespread support in the United States, as you had middle class white housewives and working class Black folks feeling pride in and support of the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and others. The 99% movement (Occupy) is galvanizing tens of thousands of supporters across the country, and, though demographically incredibly white and middle class, shows potential to build a multi-racial movement aimed at transforming the economy, democracy, and, to some extent, social relationships. The fight back against financial capital has also been incredibly significant in being able to name the root cause beneath the crises impacting the lives of the majority of Americans and the world every day. Each of these movement moments, as well as the ones to come, have been significant in both shifting the geo-political landscape in the present, and are significant for what is to come for

social movements in the United States. For the first time in two decades, capitalism and socialism are words that are part of the common vernacular. All in all, we think that we are seeing the building of a social movement in the United States that is now being acknowledged throughout the world—this is significantly different than what's been true even over the last five years. We agree with GGJ that conditions are likely to get even worse, particularly when combined with the ecological crises, and that there are incredible opportunities for coordination and broader fronts of struggle over the next period.

### **Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC)**

We feel there has to be a major focus on organizing and education; and not just grassroots organizing but political organizing. The fight around the different fronts of struggle: housing, foreclosure, hunger, veterans and prisoners returning home, and the question of land. These are all make it or break it fights to happen in the next couple of years. They have to be struggles that take into account what we call projects of survival. The whole Occupy motion is good with the fight back -- demonstration here, demonstration there -- but at the end of the day we're figuring out how to feed people and figure out a place for people to live. As a movement we don't really have that stuff together but we should because we live in a country that has so much abundance. We're not talking the 'social servicey' approach to providing the basic necessities of life but people can be politicized while they get the basic necessities. So a lot of people fail with not dealing with the basic necessities. Like any army you have to make sure that your troops are fed and housed; and some groups are really good at feeding and housing their troops and others, not so good. So they either lose membership because they're not providing the political education or providing the basic needs. As things get worse there are few leaders for PPEHRC across the country, except for about three people who are struggling to stay alive.

We still haven't really mastered the use of technology and we still have a huge digital divide. There's a group of revolutionaries out there who are 40 and above and have lost their jobs. They're not being engaged the way they need to be engaged. We're not engaging with this part of the New Class as much as we could be because they're disconnected from technology. We're hearing from a lot of young people across the country which is great but there's still that missing piece that's out there. They include workers who used to work at GM and Ford but they were never really introduced to technology, except for maybe their kids, and all they can do is e-mail, if that.

The Social Forum could consciously take on the digital divide in a real revolutionary kind of way where it has not been done in any kind of place, in any major way. It would literally mean writing down the names of every major organization and making sure that May First (or somebody) gets the kind of resources to actually go to those locations and assess the relationship of those organizations to technology.

### **Poverty Working Group (PWG)**

As noted in Question A, we proceed from the assumption that fundamental changes have taken place in the economic base—moving from the industrial age to the age of electronics, with its attendant permanent elimination of jobs, increase in poverty and the threat of poverty, and also its potential for expanded democracy and meeting basic human needs—and this necessitates a new politics and social order.

There is a possibility, a danger, that the old ways of thinking will be carried forward in this period—that is, seeing poverty as individual rather than structural failure--and that means that poor people will be seen as irrelevant and possibly even an hindrance to a new order. We affirm, on the contrary, that the answers to the problems of survival of the people and our planet lie in the lived experience of organized and conscious people who know firsthand about poverty.

We include here those millions of dispossessed US workers who daily face the threat of poverty but have been carefully taught that poverty is a result of personal failure and depravity. If the USSF process is to achieve its potential and aspirations, this sector must be brought into the process in a major way. For their survival and the fulfillment of the potential of this period, all must come to understand the character of this period and the real causes of poverty. We (the Poverty Working Group and the organization we generated, The Assembly to End Poverty) are actively reaching out to this sector through our One Class-One Cause Campaign, and we seek the support of the NPC to ensure the inclusion of all who live in and face the threat of poverty in the USSF process.

### **Project South (PS)**

[Response for Questions B & D]

Unless an independent social movement with its own economic and social agenda arises, the financial and political crisis will deepen over the next five years – regardless of a Republican or Democratic win in 2012. At the same time, racialized legislation to criminalize our communities (including anti-immigration legislation sweeps 3 Deep South states) is connected to aggressive attempts to disenfranchise our communities.

Through redistricting, voter identification laws, targeted intimidation of Black and immigrant communities, young and elderly people, and the disenfranchisement of poor people, formerly incarcerated people, and those displaced by the foreclosure crisis, in 2012 the number of US residents legally banned from participating in the national election will be the highest since the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965.

Energy and resources driven into the National elections, however, threatens to shift the focus and priorities of movement building efforts and could weaken social movement forces. That momentum can be re-directed if we are positioned strategically and maintain focus on movement principles and directions. How do movement organizations use the Social Forum and Movement Assembly vehicles locally, regionally, and nationally to grow coordinated plans of action rooted in specific fronts of struggle? How do we connect to the momentum of the elections to create true democratic spaces for people?

### **Sociologists Without Borders (SWB)/Sociologistas Sin Fronteras (SSF)**

The current political moment is crucial, and action now can produce much more significant change than at other times in history. It is urgent that we develop effective ways to bring people together around demands for radical redistribution of wealth and power in our society. Currently, there are new opportunities created by the emergence of the “Occupy Wall Street” mobilizations, and we should work to find ways to connect with these fronts of struggle and to bring in the lessons and models we’ve developed in the course of organizing the U.S. and World Social Forums. For instance, we have models for consensus processes and have articulated principles and models of action (i.e. PMAs) that can help mobilize diverse groups to address the vast inequalities of our society. As we know these inequalities have been reproduced in social movements—including OWS, and the USSF has found ways to confront this challenge. *We need to spread these lessons so new groups don’t have to do all the work of re-learning them.*

### **U.S. Human Rights Network (USHRN)**

The Network Coordinating Center sees this period as one of instability and experimentation. It is to us that the ruling class forces do not have a long term plan, but are rather engaging in a great deal of crisis management. We see several overlapping crisis in play that define the moment, including: a) the globalization of production and the reorganization of the state on a global scale to facilitate the rule of finance capital, b)

increasing intra-national polarization creating new national and international class alignments, b) a rapidly advancing and deepening ecological crisis that is threatening the viability of human civilization. These multiple crisis pose a tremendous challenge and opportunity to the social movements. Although the social movements are not in a position to take the lead on resolving these crisis as of yet, they are rapidly advancing in their strength and knowledge on a global scale with movements in Asia (particularly India and Nepal) and South America leading the way.

### **U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (USSEN)**

We are in the midst of a historic moment. The dual crises of the economy and the ecology provide an opportunity for fundamental change. The failings of the neoliberal capitalist model have been laid bare. This new period is marked by an intense division at the top among the ruling parties for the presidency as well as a new insurgency and upturn in class and democratic struggles. Inspired by Egypt and Wisconsin, OWS has served as a ‘critical force,’ a militant minority that has quickly drawn allies from a wider progressive majority, such as unions and community organization. With its focus of Wall St, it is taking the form of a nascent and emerging popular front vs finance capital, but with a wide range of perspectives—reformist, revolutionary, and all points in between. Although OWS is nonpartisan, and probably should remain that way, it has already served to energize the left-progressive base inside and outside the electoral arenas, and has already shift the terms of national political discussion. This is all very favorable, but much remains. We’re only at the beginning of this new period.

The key challenge is to work across our silos. We already have a considerable degree of agreement about what’s we’re fighting *against*. In order to achieve transformative change, we must marry this with a clearer vision and articulation of what we are *for* – a pluralist vision that recognizes that there are many paths to the same ends. SEN’s involvement with the USSF was partially motivated by this objective.

The USSF can serve as a vehicle to advance greater articulation and convergence around vision and specific goals.

### **Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)**

[Response for questions B & C]

The current political landscape - depicted by the numerous leaderless and non-violent people’s movements that continue to organize across the country, and have arisen around the globe - offer powerful new possibilities for movement-building, cooperation,

and more peaceful means for resolving discord and challenging political and institutional structures that devalue life and perpetuate inequity. At the same time, economic injustices, political dead-locks, and excessive militarization creates a climate of social unrest where hope and commitment to collective and positive change could easily be usurped by fear, selfish desire, and protectionism. The U.S. Social Forum movement provides a vital path for channeling efforts toward a better future where it serves as a marketplace of ideas and techniques to birth new agendas for social good and activism. Further, the Social Forum plays an important role in bringing together people of various ethnicities, backgrounds, and experiences and providing opportunities for them to listen to each other, appreciate each other, and seek solutions together. It is real democracy operating with a moral compass that allows us both to teach and to learn from one another.

According to its founding documents, the vision of the Social Forum is also to serve as a marketplace of ideas – a place of synergistic birthing of new agendas and identities - which is one of the reasons WILPF sees the SF as a key part of the development of capacity and leadership, both for our organization and for others. We believe strongly that we need to nurture a generation of competent amateurs who have a clear view of our history and the energy to advance the movement, and USSF is a crucial venue for developing those capabilities.

The explosion of the Occupy movements have brought together a diverse movement together targeting corporations, government collusion, and the elite 1 percent. It has brought the issues of war, poverty, debt, jobs, health, among others, under one theme with the assertion that we are the overwhelming majority – the 99percent – and we should be in control. Most significantly, civil disobedience is being used and taught as the means to challenge the powers that be. This movement has impacted our vocabulary, media coverage and peoples' sense of being part of empowered majority that doesn't seem to be slowing down. As the NPC meets in January, it is imperative that we recognize that a new political opportunity and period has developed in the U.S. The Occupy movement reflects a new growing consciousness and movement of working people in the U.S. – a part of the international movement that has been missing in response to the world economic crisis.

***Question C: The 2007 and 2010 USSF brought many attendees, some for the first time and others to a more in-depth understanding of what a Social Forum is. As the global economic and ecological crisis deepens, do you see a specific role that the Social Forum process can play (1) within US social movement building; and (2) in relationship to the World Social Forums or other national or international social movement building processes? How do we then connect in meaningful ways to grassroots struggles inside and outside of the US?***

### **East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC)**

Leadership of People of Color (POC) is an important principled stance. This will be criticized even more given the successes of Occupy Wall Street (OWS). We will need to deepen our analysis and be able to clarify this stance to internal and external audiences. This also relates to the WSF stance of centering the Third World. In Will's opinion the WSF may be easing off of this stance. In Dakar he heard of discussions at the IC about moving the WSF to Europe.

Concretely the USSF could offer leadership to local U.S. movements and organizations' concrete exposure to the demands, history, and context of international struggles to deepen the work. How can US movements acknowledge the struggles against global capital and not rely on US privilege spoken or unspoken? How can the movement building on the block, barrio, rez etc. be shaped by international forces? In the 1960's urban revolutionaries were deeply impacted by the Third World decolonization movements. Internationalizing the struggle was not a privileged activity the same way it is today. For example EMEAC has learned tremendously from participating in GGJ international delegations and other WSF related events. The local work does not stop but crucial connections are made from the international participation. Also international participation helps inform our outlook and demands so that we are not reformist. Even though we focus our work locally, we are focused on transforming the entire system as it impacts the local community.

### **Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ) Alliance**

#### **What we accomplished**

- ***The USSF was useful in building and strengthening relationships among the grassroots organizing sector.*** New initiatives were developed like the National Domestic Workers Alliance and Right to the City Alliance in 2007. In 2010 the NDWA and Jobs with Justice led the establishment of the Excluded



Workers Congress. Relationships were also strengthened among climate and environmental justice groups. Additionally, the very fact of the location of the USSF II and the incorporation of Detroit organizations into the process served to bring into greater alignment organizers and activists in the deindustrialized Midwest with southern, southwestern, coastal and indigenous organizations, many of which had begun developing functional relationships ten or even twenty years previously.

- ***The forum increased its very dynamic, diverse character.*** The spirit of the forum was very strong. Feedback from many participants was that the experience was very transformative for them and their organizations. Representation by youth, queers, and people of color was strong.
- ***We were much more engaged with local organizations in the process.*** There have been some important outcomes building on the USSF experience for local organizations, including the PMA process that has continued over the past year, and support for the fight against the local incinerator.
- ***International allies were much more engaged in the USSF.*** This was helpful for their understanding of the USSF process and of movements in the USSF. Their writings post USSF also reflect that they found the USSF innovative and an important advance for the social forum process overall. This interaction was made possible in part by an increased resource base, and also the political will of the NPC to make it a priority in Detroit.
- ***The caravans once again proved successful.*** These have proven to be important to building community among the participants and providing a mechanism for collaborating organizations to strengthen their relationships. They were also very effective in building excitement and momentum towards the USSF.
- ***For GGJ the second USSF was a success.*** We had 100% participation by our member organizations. Several groups brought large delegations. It was an important space for political education and development of their members. We helped bring international allies and strengthen our relationships with international social movements.

#### **What we did not accomplish**

- ***The forum did not necessarily create cross-unity engagement and frame in the broader movement.*** The USSF in Detroit felt that there were a number of thematic tracks that were disconnected from each other. The methodology did not encourage cross-sectoral building across issues. Groups were much more intentional in terms of their organizational and alliance building goals within the USSF, but there was not really a sense of how to connect those efforts to the other forces working on other issues. The PMA final assembly helped to bring all

of the pieces together in one activity. It was a very successful event, but did not reflect deeper coordination between the tracks that may have resulted in more unified outcomes

- ***We did not reach out broadly enough to build the NPC.*** Some of the bigger national organizations with more left of center politics were not involved in the planning. This anchored the USSF more solidly in left politics, but this is not the purpose of the forum – it is meant to create a broader unity at scale with a common adversary – neoliberal globalization. It is meant to be a broader tent to allow for political diversity. This was one of our objectives recognizing the limitations of the first USSF, yet we did not succeed in bringing broader forces to the table.
- ***We did not have a clear strategy post USSF*** – The USSF process immediately went dormant after Detroit. The Peoples' Movement Assembly process was very dynamic and was one of the defining characteristics of the USSF. But it was unclear on how to follow up on the resolutions that were passed – unless you were in the PMA working group, the organizations and movements did not have opportunity to further debate and get endorsements post-USSF. If the PMA was intended to be the strategy and action aspect of the forum, we failed to develop the process and infrastructure that would allow for this. Less than a year after the USSF the public sector was under attack throughout the Midwest and public workers were mobilizing. The fact that 40% of the participants in the Detroit USSF were from the Midwest and we were not in a position to help mobilize people is sobering and raises questions as to the overall usefulness of the USSF to movement building and social impact.
- ***We did not have an effective process to handle controversy.*** The controversy over the Zionist workshop was very unfortunate. We did not have a good enough process to handle this conflict and it took a toll on relationships between some individuals and organizations. The fact that the decision on whether to cancel the workshop defaulted to a small set of people was not good.
- ***The Local Organizing and National Planning Committee process did not necessarily help build relationships among and between its members.*** Local capacity in Detroit was underestimated. Historical differences in some cases could not be overcome. In reality 3 anchor organizations remained, yet in some cases operated at an arms length from each other by the time the forum took place. We often had an environment on the NPC that was demoralizing. Differences often devolved into tirades and personal attacks. This undermined the potential spirit of unity. The fact that the NPC has not had a discussion in over a year is partly a testament to that.
- ***There was not a clear coordination among staff.*** We had much more staff capacity for the second USSF, but the staff structure and accountability process

was not clear. Several staff members worked more under the supervision of specific work areas. The division of labor between coordinators at times was not clear. There was not a sense of overall coordination of the staff.

### **International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN)**

Again, the Occupy movement has hit a nerve for many people that our social movements have not, even during the economic crisis and in light of growing awareness of the ecological crisis our planet faces. How can the USSF be a useful vehicle for this growing impulse? How can regional forums and the PMA process relate to general assemblies? What activities and building process is more likely to engage organizations and groups of people organizing that we have not yet reached? A good start may be the direction of the PMAs and regional forums that are built on demands that impact on people's lives and that are in relationship to what we are struggling against (not just a wish-list but a more practical set of demands and ways forward given the context).

For example, as part of organizing regional forums, we could bring resources, information and facilitate the sharing of experiences of taking over of buildings and public space as well as moving people back into their homes, into empty homes and resisting foreclosure. Other similarly practice work could be the basis of these – transformative justice processes for community accountability as alternatives to policing, prisons and the removal of children from their communities.

Building toward the next national forum, these regional forums could bring scale to these local and regional activities by sharing methods, building coordination not only of activities but legal and popular defense of those activities, and identifying loops holes in laws and policies that can support the reclaiming of public and private space, buildings and residents, alternative justice, etc. If we also organize the USSF to be a true convergence – a counter-forum during a critical national or international event or gathering in the US – then we'll also bring and hopefully move people whose main political activity is convergence-based activism.

IJAN would like to see the US Social Forum more integrated with international movement building including but not limited to the World Social Forums. Other relevant efforts to integrate and build with include the World Conferences on Racism, the international effort to designate 2012-2022 as the International Decade for People of African Descent, landless people's movement, indigenous people and environmental justice gatherings. We have witnessed a powerful and mutually reinforcing relationship between uprisings across the globe – most notably Egypt and Greece – and the Occupy

movement in the US. This is a relationship that the USSF could more explicitly build and leverage.

### **Jubilee USA Network**

For the United States Social Forum to genuinely play a role as the global economic and ecological crisis deepens, the forum must align itself with the people's struggles and reach out through the venue of not only organizations, but individuals. The USSF is integral to US Social movement building and should harness its power to address local and regional needs through smaller gatherings such as the PMA's and other outlets. As continued gatherings in the U.S. occur, and as we highlight local struggles, we must also consistently make the links between the global issues. These spaces can be used to deepen relationships between global solidarity organizations based in the U.S. We must use the USSF to connect with each other, and in doing so cultivate stronger global justice movement. Allied actions and continued communication locally between these organizations will strengthen our involvements in the WSF and international movements.

### **League of Revolutionaries for a New America (LRNA)**

[Response includes Questions C & F: "relevant, does not answer directly."]

1000 threads of connectivity relate the occupy motion with the social forum and movement assembly processes, and the Zapatista inspiration and influence – from the organizational form of autonomous, horizontal communities and spaces self-organized by collective leadership connected to each other and the world by social media, to declarations summing up analyses and visions of another way of being and moving in the world, to embracing the call for "another world is possible."

As USSF organizers we have gained valuable experience from USSF 2007 and 2010, and the movement has picked up speed. The US Social Forum and Peoples Movement Assembly embody an intentionality that ensured a collective leadership that was diverse – people of color, women, queer, and working class – and a breadth across many fronts of struggle.

***Within this political context, what do we need to concentrate on now that we are no longer trying to spark the movement?***

We need to make an in depth assessment of the movement and the social forum within the overall revolutionary process to figure out where the movement is and where it needs to go. We also, as the NPC, need to struggle for political clarity for ourselves as the national planning body and actors within the larger movement, as well as for movement convergence across the diverse fronts of struggle engaged in the social forum and movement assembly process.

Two developments we should take note of. 1. A substantial number of white folks are now realizing that the system (global capitalism and the corporate state) is screwing them too; and despite their education and privilege, their future is bleak. 2. The objective crisis has been in place and the mass movement is beginning to take off.

Work within the mass movement has to be about going from spontaneity to consciousness – and from social consciousness to class consciousness. A critical next step is developing a mass consciousness raising project – understanding systemic root causes, visions, and engaging in daily practice to make all this happen. The USSF and PMA process have to relate to this task, as well as the task of developing organizational relationships to the many motions and fronts of struggle.

This also means we have to set up within the NPC/PMA a political education process to prepare ourselves for these tasks.

The social forum and movement assembly process can provide the context for the development of a relationship between the occupy motion and other fronts of social struggle, and the further consolidation of all fronts of struggle into an organizational structure that is politically consciousness and thus independent of the ruling class and the corporations. Practically this means creating the conditions for the movement process to move from defensive and scattered social struggles toward a more united political struggle.

Social movements are creating an alter-globalization from below, and because of electronic technology we can produce an abundance of all the things humanity requires to satisfy our needs. The vision of an egalitarian, cooperative and peaceful society in which production, distribution and consumption are organized to meet human needs and to protect the planet is possible and necessary. In social struggle new forms of self-organizing and horizontal processes of collective leadership and consensus are being practiced. Over the centuries social movements did not resolve the systemic problems of exploitation, poverty, oppression, and war at their root, leaving this unfinished task to social movements in this historic moment.

***The US Social Forum and Peoples Movement Assembly process needs to step up and take its place in history. The moment is urgent and the opportunities are great. Do we have the organization and people in place to make it a reality? Make it happen!***

### **MayFirst/People Link (MF/PL)**

We think the USSF already connects with all kinds of grassroots struggles and we think it already plays the role of "gathering place" for these movements. The Social Forum is a place to come together periodically with a very strong agenda of interactions. The last USSF was so much more politically developed than the first one that it proves the importance of the Social Forum in this country.

The USSF, for all its conflicts and challenges, demonstrated to the US left that multi-racial organizing can happen and this understanding was critical to, for example, the Occupy movement. It is, effectively, a major political statement and proof that that statement is feasible. There's a long way to go, of course, and the USSF has to play the role of modeling racially integrated organizing led predominantly by people of color.

Outside the US, the Social Forum should participate in the development of the "border challenge" Social Forum movement -- a movement that refuses to recognize the artificial borders that divide us. Movements within the US should begin participating in more solidarity actions with movements outside of the US. Inspiration, like that from the Arab Spring that helped drive the occupy movement, is not enough.

Bringing delegations of US activists to global convergences like the WSF is transformative and helps build solidarity, which are both important parts of international movement work. Based on MF/PL's participation in the WSF International Council, along with other members of the NPC, we're aware of the necessity of alternatives to the forum process. Yet it remains as one of the only places to organize internationally an alter-globalization movement, which is still desperately needed today. Increasingly, we're seeing regional and thematic forums with much greater success than the larger WSF because of the intentionality and relevance that these forums bring to both local and international movements. Related to this, the USSF remains a highly-respected event in the international social forum movement due to its prioritization of leadership from truly grassroots leadership.

In 2012, a Maghreb/Mashrek regional forum and a world forum on Palestine are just two examples of international processes that MF/PL will be involved in. These will no doubt

inspire our work towards the next USSF and further our praxis of using communications and technology to increase democratic participation at forum events.

### **Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO)**

The Occupy: Movement is a flash in the pan, albeit a bright one. By itself, it cannot develop into a movement building vehicle unless it is tied to a stable organizational structure that has defined outcomes and best steps that are understood. The SF and the SF process can be viewed as the “Joint Chiefs of Staff” that can gather said visionaries from this movement and from those other fronts of struggle into a moment of deep political discussion followed by regional plans. The heightened level of productivity of the American worker is not just a national phenomenon. Workers around the globe have been and are being replaced making all of society fragile as these epoch changes unfold. Again, I see no other mechanism in place that can unite the different regional battles together by reaching out to those champions in those fights in a way to show the ties that bind. The natural extension is to try and create even stronger connections to those similar struggles being highlighted by the WSF process as we work to become better stewards of international concerns.

### **Move To Amend (MTA) Coalition**

MTA believes the USSF continues to be the best place for those with a systemic critique to convene to hone strategies and share best practices and tactics to move society beyond liberal incremental demands toward the transformational political and economic systems.

We also believe the USSF could become the place to develop comprehensive concrete campaigns that 1) struggle and resist against the immediate impacts of the harm and abuse of corporate capitalism, 2) create alternative cooperative systems and mechanisms that meet human needs without destroying the earth we depend upon for survival, and 3) build the program and movement in will take to dismantle and/or transform existing systems that are based on exploitation and oppression.

We recognize the importance of exploring the question of international movement building opportunities, although as a coalition we have not focused on it. So we cannot speak to the issue, and look forward to learning from those who have focused energy and thought in that area.

## **People Organized To Win Employment Rights (POWER)**

[Response for questions C & F]

As the global crises of empire, economy and ecology are exacerbated, there is a specific role that the Social Forum process can play within US social movement building and in relationship to the World Social Forums or international social movement building processes. We think that the Social Forum can help our developing social movements cohere and potentially federate into larger, multi-sector and multi-issue movements that embrace plurality yet have significant impact. We do think that it is time to start a discussion about a third USSF, which would include discussion and debate about the necessary transformations in the process. We are not firm on the question of whether or not the Forums should take a regional or national form. Regional forums can build infrastructure and combat isolation, particularly in locations where social movement infrastructure is challenged. National forums can help to build infrastructure and facilitate convergence and coordination. Both are necessary outcomes, regardless of the form. And both are necessary in this current political moment. The biggest questions, in our opinion, facing the National Planning Committee (NPC) and the USSF are the questions of what function or outcome is possible from the USSF in this political moment, whether or not our forces are in a position to achieve this outcome, and how to build the infrastructure necessary to advance our goals. While the USSF is an important part of this equation, it is not all of it.

## **People's Institute for Society and Beyond (PISAB) - Greater New Orleans Organizers Roundtable (GNOOR)**

Jordan Flaherty (Left Turn Magazine) - "Struck with the similarities between Detroit and New Orleans. The decrease in population (Detroit population went down from 2 million to 900,000). Vacancies and home abandonment is high. Urban Gardening can be seen in a whole city block and seems odd."

Maria Victoire (4th World Movement) - "Unemployment is 46% in Detroit. The tee-shirts made a positive impact. demonstrated togetherness."

Monique Harden (Advocates for Environmental Human Rights) - "An advertisement I saw on a big wall read Quicken Loans has made Motown our Home Town demonstrated how Detroit is vulnerable to predators."



Alex Bernadett (Tulane University) “Raising awareness of issues that the national media overlooks on a level that will attract national attention, as USSF Detroit 2010 did.”

Andrea Slocum (Critical Resistance) “The USSF has the tools to communicate, globally, therefore should maintain the communications and begin to work on tightening those tools so the communication flows freely and widely.”

### **Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC)**

The Social Forum can help with struggles against poverty but we’ve got to stop messing around with the question of Homeland Security, the Patriot Act, the criminalization of the poor. What are we doing in terms of challenging so-called progressive lawyers to really challenge some of these unjust laws? We now have a situation across the entire country where for a long time in history people have been getting arrested over and over again.

Among most of the Occupies that we’ve talked to in different parts of the country, the NLG is doing the regular ‘let’s support these folks and go to the courtrooms with them’ but they are not doing forward-thinking, legal challenges. Back in the day they had COINTELPRO and all these other things but now we have billions of dollars spent on preempting civil liberties and we don’t have any apparatus set up to fight that. In different parts of the world they have various people who are seen as human rights defenders; and they have a legal community that is set up to try and support those defenders. We have a lot of legal folks that are tied into the very legal system that we are trying to challenge and that is problematic, especially because the poorer you are the more vulnerable you are with your immigration status or unpaid parking tickets or if you’re on probation but want to get involved in this process.

Something else that would really be helpful is that we haven’t written the kinds of papers that we need to write, especially for the international community. We’re not convinced that the international community still sees the strategic significance of concentrating on the poor in the U.S. as benefitting them and their struggles in different parts of the world against these same corporations and our government. It continues to be controversial who the international community gets exposed to and what kind of work gets exposed that’s happening in the U.S. in terms of resistance.

We think it is still essential that PPEHRC is part of the World Social Forum process. We think the WSF would have had a very different view of what’s happening in the U.S. had we not. From the beginning we had to do things like take videos and photographs about

poverty in this country. There were major fights about whether or not they wanted to embrace the U.S. In the beginning they wouldn't even have us at the table – let alone try to push the international community to understand how it benefits them to focus on the poor in middle America; and the wasting of money because we're going to go start a war somewhere. We think there's plenty of international rhetoric out there that 'we don't equate the people of the U.S. with the government,' and from a movement perspective it can sometimes be viewed that way.

PPEHRC has been strong advocates of the whole Occupy process. We look at this from a class perspective. We've been consulting with about six Occupies where we try to encourage people to call for human rights observers and witnesses, like the rest of the international community does. It would've been really great when we knew that some of these Occupies were going to be torn down to call for statements or observers from other parts of the world to bear witness to what's happening here. As a people, we continue to hold onto this U.S. exceptionalism thing and don't embrace some of the things that the international community does.

### **Project South (PS)**

[Response for Questions A & C]

Movements need convergence in order to increase the scale of work and impact. The U.S. Social Forum planning process and convergence space has contributed to the growth of social movement power in the U.S. The Peoples Movement Assemblies offer constructive spaces to practice community governance and to coordinate across multiple strategies and multiple geographies.

The emergence of the Social Forum process in the United States represents a break with old dynamics and dichotomies. Ideologies are being reconsidered. New challenges are being exposed, including displacement, economic destabilization, and recolonization. Collective understandings of intersectionality are debated and synthesized into comprehensive fronts of struggle.

In practical terms, the Social Forum process provides space for thousands of people to share and receive political education. Communication infrastructure is tested to determine innovations in data sharing, logistics, planning, and resource sharing. Entry points are increased to include people who are searching for political homes and ways to be involved in their communities. Organizers are invited to design and practice

infrastructural systems to take care of basic needs, health, wellness, language diversity, cultural expression, transportation, and lodging in innovative ways.

Politically, the Forum and Movement Assemblies create clear opportunities for movement actors to develop coordinated political direction and shared strategies based in collective assessment of opportunities and conditions. If we build the process well, we can continue deepening levels of political integration that include organized movement formations, alliances, and united fronts. The process is also a training ground for new generations of leadership. Organizers and leaders are developed through the process and are capable of larger scale work, reflecting, in practice and strategy, the analysis, relationships and innovations cultivated throughout the Social Forum process.

**Additional opportunities of the Social Forum include:**

- converge social forces working on frontlines of neoliberal attacks and creating alternatives from a shared vision of justice
- build coordinated movement activity across the US in local and regional spaces
- de-center the geographic focus on the coasts and develop more nuanced analysis of breadth of regional histories, differences, and possibilities
- practice democratic, self-determined & structured spaces for masses of people
- connect to global struggles through building intentional alliances
- integrate young people and share the best of intergenerational practices

**Sociologists Without Borders (SWB)/Sociologistas Sin Fronteras (SSF)**

The most important developments in the USSF 2010 process are the **People's Movement Assembly** process as a model for local-> national organizing and the innovations led by the Detroit Local Organizing Committee to work towards creating processes that prevent the marginalization and exploitation of local organizing committees that are essential for national actions. Despite our failures in fully achieving the aims of building up rather than wearing down Detroit organizers and movements, we did advance some organizing principles and models that we should learn from. The early efforts to **educate all USSF participants about Detroit**, the **work groups**, the **"Detroit Highlighted"** sessions at the USSF were all excellent. Also key was the **"Detroit to Dakar"** initiative to connect local organizers in Detroit with the global process and to encourage global analyses. More can be done to expand on these

models of action as we try to realize and spread awareness of the principles behind them.

Other innovations were in the **expansion of opensource technology** and in the use of the wiki site. While it still is difficult for some, even many, people to use this technology, the ICT working group made some important advances in breaking down barriers and educating more people to use this resource. The wiki was extremely helpful for my working group and I think it is a highly underutilized resource that we should be using to sustain our work following the Forum. I frequently referred people to the wiki pages we used, and have tried to use the page to help keep people informed about media reports and other analyses of the USSF and WSF process. More can be done here.

### **U.S. Human Rights Network (USHRN)**

The Social Forum can provide space for the social movements to converge, but to move forward on the 10 years of accumulated experience, we believe it is time that the convergence be translated into synergistic demand development for the Social Movements going forward to better address the economic and ecological crisis.

### **U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (USSEN)**

In the US, USSF provides common ground for all those seeking progressive and radical social change. It helps shape a framework of critical questions, and allows a variety of venues for discussion and radical education, as well as the creation of new initiatives out of the creativity and synergy unleashed. Hopefully, it will help build rooted organizations as well as fanning the flames of the spontaneous movements. On the global front, we can give expression to the diverse voices in our country in these wider global venues, plus bring back new ideas from other countries. This has been especially helpful to USSEN in the past

***Question D: As the nation approaches critical elections in 2012, how can the USSF separate itself from traditional bourgeois understandings of social change (i.e. demands for reform rather than transformation of the exploitative economic system)? How can the USSF process centralize working class struggles, including grassroots democracy, issues of survival, the needs of the many versus the needs of the few? Given all this, what should the Social Forum's relationship be to the 2012 electoral process?***

### **East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC)**

First of all, the SF process and its coordinating leadership needs to be clear about what traditional bourgeois understandings of social change are. It is clear that there are very different views of what constitutes social change and the actions that can bring it about. So developing a working definition/understanding of this would be critical first and foremost.

Additionally, it is important to continue to internationalize the USSF. Occupy Wall Street's theme of "We are the 99%" is vague and disappointing. In most communications it refers to the 99% within the United States and assumes that the same processes are in place all around the world. There is no recognition that even if CEO's were abolished and the US were completely equitable, the economic system would still be exploiting people around the world and continuing colonial processes of resource extraction, xenophobic immigration policies, and militarism-- like socialized countries of Europe. Just as we want privileged (White) people to be accountable to people of color, even if they start off as ignorant of how their privilege is based upon oppression, the USSF must help even U.S. people of color to see their connections and even privileges when it comes to the world economy.

Again, it is crucial that the analysis and meaning of the USSF be sharp because there will be so much movement and motion in 2012. We should have an open tent BUT our focus should be on 1. Survival of Frontline Communities, 2. Destroying the Existing Economic and Political system 3. Transforming the economic system into a sustainable and just system. We all know that the Democrats have very little to offer. The USSF shouldn't join in the campaign but if there are political parties or organizations or elected officials who want to engage on our terms-- great. Concretely the USSF and the PMA can help show the similarities and differences of candidates based on the 3 criteria above. If we're doing something on Poverty- are the Democrats the lesser of two evils? If we're doing something on Criminal Justice, perhaps the Democrats are

indistinguishable. So we can stay focused on the issues but show that it may be strategic to engage with the system in some ways.

### **International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN)**

The Social Forum process – both internationally and nationally – seemed designed for the building of a broader movement and has largely engaged NGOs (some more grassroots and mass-based, some of the ideological left and many from the more traditional NGO/non-profit world). Our reading of Occupy implies that this is not enough – that we have to orient toward popular movements.

The USSF could be place for genuine political struggle around reformist, more fundamentally transformative (or revolutionary) and the building of alternatives. In our view it should not be a place for the building of a “Left” but the growth of a broad and increasingly popular movement. In building this there will be opportunities to build the more “revolutionary” aspects of the work and relationships, strategies and shared agendas across those doing it.

When it comes to electoral politics, the difference between local and national government, and our influence on it is great. The USSF could use the large election season to push progressives into local seats of power, and develop criteria for how we as movements make these seats accountable to our movements.

The question of non-electoral social change, specifically questions that are arising about the nature and forms of democracy, in response to economic inequality are central to struggles here and across the globe. The social forum can be an exciting opportunity to really give details and focus to this discussion in the US and in relationship to popular uprisings elsewhere.

### **Jubilee USA Network**

The USSF has an important role in the 2012 electoral process. Our civic engagement is a right that many of our predecessors have marched, fought and died for. Neglecting this process in an effort to completely separate ourselves from the process would be a disservice to those that have worked so hard for our right to vote and have a voice in our electoral process, and those that continue to be disenfranchised due to status of citizenship or other systematic attempts at disenfranchisement. Furthermore, for Jubilee USA, our partners in the Global South look to us in the “belly of the beast” to enact

changes that have to currently go through institutional channels, but also would help to build stronger communities and movements now. That being said, the “left” has been abandoned and left with little to no choice on who will put their needs at the forefront. The role of the USSF is to raise our issues and provide a platform in the 2012 electoral process, so that our issues are no longer marginalized and pushed aside. We can use our movement spaces to push the traditional parties to the left *and* organize communities for immediate reforms while envisioning deeper transformation. At the same time, we need to continue to support communities who continue to be disengaged and disenfranchised from the voting process, and use these as opportunities for grassroots growth.

### **MayFirst/People Link (MF/PL)**

We believe that the Social Forum should steer clear of all elections. Electoral work, while an acceptable tactic in the eyes of many, is not a unifying concept for movements and, when not placed appropriately in the politics of an organization, it can drain resources, raise false expectations, and allow the ruling class to define the parameters of the political discourse. That's one of the lessons we can draw from the Obama candidacy and current Presidency. People should work around elections, such as the USSF letting campaign groups use its lists, etc., but nothing more.

### **Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO)**

Perhaps a new area of focus is that we need to brainstorm how to collectivize and then share political papers that highlight our points of view. Many who attended the USSF are not tying themselves to elections or to political parties, or to this or that candidate understanding that our circumstances are well beyond narrow politics. How can we print and then share such an analysis is what we may have to consider. It may also be time to re-visit the SF Standards and Rules of Engagement in an effort to more clearly state our points of unity. We may need to produce a joint document, or call for regional papers that state the importance of what the SF process is and why it is not an endorsing tool for anything but the needs of the many outweighing the needs of the few. As important as national elections are and especially the 2012 election, we may need to point out that our demands and needs are generally not points found on campaigns that favor this or that party.

### **Move To Amend (MTA) Coalition**

US elections are deeply undemocratic, and perversely are the place where the current political and economic system attempts to legitimize itself. Elections are also when and where the majority of Americans think about “politics,” so we at MTA believe elections should be thought and talked about as an arena of struggle, and that it is a profound mistake not to engage in them.

We hope the USSF provides an opportunity to offer respectful but candid criticism of the Platforms of all political parties, the policies of the Obama administration, and the major NGO non-profit industrial complex that serves as apologists for them.

We recognize that existing laws create roadblocks to try to prevent groups representing organized constituencies of color and low-income folks from participating in elections. Indeed, it is worth noting that the ruling elite create these roadblocks precisely because they fear our participation in elections.

So we want to help folks learn the “nuts and bolts” of running (and winning) local elections, as well as to develop creative and entertaining “bird-dogging” tools and inspire movement activists to use them.

### **People’s Institute for Society and Beyond (PISAB) - Greater New Orleans Organizers Roundtable (GNOOR)**

Andrea Slocum (Critical Resistance) Maybe in voter registration, nationally? Not sure if the capacity is there, but that might be a way.

Derek Rankins (People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond / Students Organizing Against Racism) - “This might be tricky but we will have to choose a candidate. The NPC meeting with President Obama to see where are our goal in relationship with his.”

Alex Bernadett (Tulane University) The summer months of 2012 would be a critical time for the USSF to raise national awareness on vital issues in the 2012 National Elections.



## **Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC)**

With the 2012 elections, one of the things that we're going to be doing is the work of World Courts of Women. Using the model of these World Courts is important because you have to not just give testimonials on what the really bad issues are but how they are responsible and what can be done to fundamentally resolve those issues. We really believe in the methodology of Corinne Kumar (the International Coordinator of the Courts of Women) because it's a different process. It's not set up like a regular legal process. It's not set up like U.S. Social Forum. But the process itself, the methodology, is just as important as the verdict in the World Courts. It's one of evaluating history and culture and it's women-centered; and listening to our elders.

Issues around morals and values are going to become even more crucial as we move into 2012 and the elections because our movements are going to be perceived as traitors if we're not going to be out in the frontline – taking money from the Democratic Party and ensuring that Obama is reelected. There are a whole lot of people saying, "I'm sorry but I'm checking out for 2012 because I need to get this Obama money and I have all these obligations to ensure that Obama gets reelected." And that means that people get registered to vote and that everybody is going to vote for Obama.

We have to be about pushing forward some kind of independent political motion in this country. We can talk all the rhetoric in the world about supporting independent politics but that won't happen if we never truly separate from the Democratic Party. We can't just tell people you can't work on the Democratic Party and have no other kind of alternate for them to work on.

How are we going to push forward class identity and class unity without getting out there in the electoral arena? We are so separated from electoral politics when there are still a good chunk of people out there with 'the good, the bad and the evil' choices who still loyally vote. We can't disengage from electoral politics yet we need another alternative.

That's why we've got to do crazy, bold things. Cheri ran for Sheriff this year in Philadelphia to show how we can determine and switch up what different roles can be about. She ran on the Green Party because that's all there was. But we need another alternative out there whether that's us creating a new party in this country or waiting till something emerges. That is a huge piece that we need to be talking about because if we're really talking about power we can't not be talking about electoral politics in this country and a political party. And we have yet to fully define or determine what that

party is. So we have to have that conversation. We should've had that conversation 50 years ago.

The Social Forum has to have a relationship with the electoral process. At some point it seemed that the Social Forum process had some independent politics, working group or something of the sort. A process could look like the Independent People's Progressive Network – some kind of formation like that has to be taken very seriously. There needs to be a body that looks at independent politics, just like we tried to do with the Labor Party but it never happened because it wasn't the right time in history. Now it's the right time in history but we don't have anybody building something like that. Right now people are fed up but what's our alternative to the Tea Party? That greatly concerns us.

Occupy has been so anti-electoral politics and on one hand that's really good but on the other hand it's pretending that elected officials are not having an affect on our lives everyday. Even the foreclosure fight: it isn't just the bad banks, it's those worthless politicians – both Democrats and Republicans – that never made sure they were any kinds of regulations when they got the bail out monies. At the end of the day if we had a political party it'd be really serious in this country; and it's an important stage that we can't skip.

Lastly, how do we keep our generals alive in this process? What is an independent way of funding this movement? We need to seriously look at that. If the international community – and people in this country – really thought that we were building something and that there was a significance we could really polarize things.

We continue to have this bourgeois process where we're set up to support the non-profit industrial complex. And if we look at other movements in other parts of the world they don't stand around waiting till they first get some money from the foundation world before they have an uprising. We have to engage with other movements and look for other organizing models in other parts of the world that are not organized around the non-profit organizing complex. For example, how does Africa get out 30,000 people in any given moment and use art and culture that focuses on lifting people's morale to get people involved? Those are the kinds of things that we need to look at.

We're still set up in this box where we can't really free ourselves to be as forward thinking as possible because we don't have enough organizing models that don't rely on money from foundation grants. For instance, in Philly instead of the church giving all it's money to the so-called progressive Bread and Roses Foundation, it would give it to this movement with no strings attached.

## **Project South (PS)**

[Response for Questions B & D]

Unless an independent social movement with its own economic and social agenda arises, the financial and political crisis will deepen over the next five years – regardless of a Republican or Democratic win in 2012. At the same time, racialized legislation to criminalize our communities (including anti-immigration legislation sweeps 3 Deep South states) is connected to aggressive attempts to disenfranchise our communities. Through redistricting, voter identification laws, targeted intimidation of Black and immigrant communities, young and elderly people, and the disenfranchisement of poor people, formerly incarcerated people, and those displaced by the foreclosure crisis, **in 2012 the number of US residents legally banned from participating in the national election will be the highest since the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965.**

Energy and resources driven into the National elections, however, threatens to shift the focus and priorities of movement building efforts and could weaken social movement forces. That momentum can be re-directed if we are positioned strategically and maintain focus on movement principles and directions. How do movement organizations use the Social Forum and Movement Assembly vehicles locally, regionally, and nationally to grow coordinated plans of action rooted in specific fronts of struggle? How do we connect to the momentum of the elections to create true democratic spaces for people?

## **Sociologists Without Borders (SSB)/Sociologistas Sin Fronteras (SSF)**

Elections are teachable moments. We should work with the emerging OWS efforts to develop a shadow agenda/or “people’s platform” to highlight the issues and analyses that are being left out of the electoral debates. We might advance a leaderless alternative party or fictional people’s candidate persona (like “Alice the plumber” or “Rolando the Carpenter” or “Katie the cubicle emancipator”) who might attract media/social media/blog attention as a competitor for Americans’ votes. At least two key issues would be the total transformation of our voting laws to make them fair and impervious to corruption and campaign finance reform. We could simply call on the U.S. to adopt practices consistent with international electoral standards and to base campaign contribution limits as a percentage of the median wage income. We should also support the efforts to repeal the citizen’s united and even repeal corporate personhood. Perhaps we can help raise funds and publicity for an alternative party or

“people’s platform” at the same time as we encourage people—especially marginalized groups who have been excluded from voting and voter protections- to participate in the election while also supporting efforts for broad social transformation.

### **U.S. Human Rights Network (USHRN)**

The Social Forum should strive to exist as a “dual power” space and process in relationship to the 2012 elections. It should not endorse candidates, but should instead articulate a set of principles and when and where possible, demands that the Social Movement pose to the state as a consolidated entity regardless of their outcomes.

### **U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (USSEN)**

A substantial minority, if not a majority, of the individuals involved in all the organizations taking part in the USSF, to one degree or another, will likely be taking part in the 2012 campaigns, in one way or another. Thus there is no need on our part to demand any ‘separation’ from ‘traditional bourgeois understandings.’ Rather we need to *claim and re-frame* reformist demands as part of a transformative strategy. For example, the fight for a living wage as an end in itself is reformist, but becomes radical as part of the longer term struggle for real workplace democracy. Much of the base and many of the participants in the USSF believe in reforms, exercise their right to vote, campaign for progressive candidates, and try to pass important legislation. This is especially true of our participants from labor and many in minority nationality communities. Others may find themselves more to the ‘left’ and have no interest in these things. That’s fine, but we want to include all grassroots trends in our efforts, not make unnecessary hurdles or barriers. The USSF should remain nonpartisan, but not necessarily anti-partisan. It should encourage a dialogue among progressive Democrats, third party advocates, as well as those espousing extra-parliamentary strategies. A possible tactic might be to organize a web based “Convention” to articulate a common platform through a system of voting on top planks. This could build on the PMA process.

### **Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)**

[Response for questions D & F]

As we look toward the future of movement-building, WILPF generally feels that the USSF should not be involved in electoral politics from the perspective of endorsing

candidates or allowing them to speak at USSF. However, it may be appropriate for the USSF to debate the role electoral politics plays during this significant time, and what should the role of progressives and “the left” be in electoral politics and the 2012 elections. Additionally, WILPF suggests that the next Social Forum be held in 2013, just after the next elections. We were too slow to adjust our strategies to the realities of the Obama administration. Holding the USSF in 2013 will help movement organizations reorient to the political conditions more quickly and get a collective sense of what our tasks should be post election and in light of the economic crisis. There needs to be more national and regional dialogue about what role the USSF process plays in the political situation we are in now, and how it can push forward the building of strategic relations among organizations in the U.S., as well as internationally. Additionally, there has to be more transparency within the NPC, and with the NPC and other organizations that we wish to draw into the process. If the USSF were to formalize a three-year cycle, regional and even local social forums could be encouraged during the off years. The negotiations and logistical struggles of putting together a social forum can be building blocks for further collaborations, if handled well – a sort of short-term trial of new working relationships. The advantage of proliferating social forums is that the movement-building and educational format can, through increased mobility, be accessible to ever more people.

***Question E: How has your understanding of the role of the National Planning Committee (NPC) changed over time? What alterations should it undergo as a national planning body for the USSF? What is your understanding of the NPC's relationship to the PMA (Peoples Movement Assembly) process? How can the NPC be a better vehicle to support social movement work?***

### **East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC)**

It is not clear what the role of the NPC is, as understandings vary depending on who is asked. It is our assumption that the NPC plays a role similar to that of an organization's Board of Directors: to guide the direction of the body; to develop policies and procedures; and to offer broad level support to efforts on the ground. In relation to the PMA process, we are not clear what the role of the NPC is. The NPC can be a better vehicle to support social movement work by offering analyses that link local struggles to national and international ones and continuing to support the social forum process.

### **Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ) Alliance**

[Response for Questions E & F]

Because of all of the forces in motion throughout the United States, a third USSF could be useful in the near future. The USSF could still provide the broad tent that could be a good point of convergence for the 99% movement, the grassroots organizing sector and new efforts like the New Bottom Line and the Rebuild the Dream formation. Along with stronger representation from labor this range of forces with some strategic outcomes in mind could have a major impact on the national political landscape, and represent a strong united front against capital and the Right.

The spring of 2013 could be an ideal time - in the wake of the National Elections as the new administration takes power (or the current one continues). It will be a good moment for social movements to develop strategies for the coming 4 years and beyond. The question is whether there is the political interest and capacity of the movements to organize another USSF, and whether it would be viewed as the appropriate vehicle for the moment.

But there should be a few criteria we should incorporate learning from the lessons of the previous forums:

- ***The National Planning Committee must be broadened beyond our political comfort zone.*** We should continue to maintain the central leadership of the grassroots movements with people of color, poor whites, women, queers, youth, Indigenous peoples, the disabled community, the homeless and others, but we must allow space for large, national organizations who are also in motion and who are interested in building a broader progressive movement. We also have to be creative about how the NPC engages in the planning process the growing autonomous occupy sector.
- ***National organizations, networks and alliances may have to play a bigger role in organizing a USSF.*** Local organizations who served on the NPC struggled with capacity in both 2007 and 2010. Several organizations did not join the NPC until a year or less prior to the event. In conversations with many GGJ groups that were part of the founding of the USSF are most likely stepping back from the NPC.
- ***We need strong anchor organizations with capacity and a history of working together locally.*** The intensity and pressure of organizing a USSF can strain relationships and the capacity of local groups. We need to build where we are strong so that we don't strain local organizations.
- ***Scale should not be a priority.*** The success of the next USSF should not be gauged by the number of people who attend. There should be more focus, fewer workshops, sharper debates and plenaries. The emphasis should be on developing peoples' agendas and strategies.
- ***Building on what's in motion.*** 2012 will continue to be a time of resistance. This anti- corporate, pro-democracy movement is developing and growing. The organizing strategy should be to build on the convergences and convenings that are already happening. We don't need to start from scratch because the social forum now has recognition and we need to change how we mobilize towards the USSF. We need to evaluate the efficacy of constituent/issue based working groups and build participation in each of the working groups (logistics, communications, program, technology, etc) so that they bring functionality to the event.
- ***Strengthening communications infrastructure:***
  - Tools and resources should be available to help people mobilize. For instance, the question of the list-serves and what information is available from the database, who manages, etc. should be determined in advance.
  - Communications infrastructure should be developed beforehand and utilized at the forum. People should also be able to know immediately after the forum how they can access these resources.

- Resolutions/platforms, agendas should be published immediately and a plan should be determined in advance of the USSF of how these platforms will be further debated, endorsed and published.
- ***Regrounding the role of the NPC.*** We need to elevate the expectations of NPC member responsibilities in terms of fundraising, outreach, active participation in a working group. The organizing philosophy of the planning body should be how we build and are responsible the whole and the success of the event and ensuring the needs of the process are what dictate priorities and resource allocation.

### **International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN)**

We have a clearer picture of the accountability involved in participation on the NPC – particularly to our fellow NPC members. We feel that for the NPC to be effective – both in the planning of the USSF and in support of social movement work – it cannot shy away from political leadership and struggle. The ways in which we struggle and build as an NPC should reflect and provide leadership for how the movement as a whole needs to and can do so.

Specifically, were IJAN to participate on the NPC again, we would see it as our responsibility to educate the NPC on Zionism and anti-Zionism and prepare the NPC for the backlash it may get for its support of the Palestinian liberation struggle. We would expect similar education from other groups on the NPC. This could happen through teach-ins or by making time for more depth of discussion when issues arise. These discussions should get to differences and cross-movement tensions and stretch all of us. For instance, we do not expect the NPC to take on an anti-Zionist position. There is not enough depth of knowledge or experience to do so. But, we expect there to be a commitment to becoming informed as a group and struggling to figure out what experiences like Stand with Us mean about our weaknesses, vulnerability, strengths and opportunities as a movement as a whole.

### **Jubilee USA Network**

Our understanding of the role of the NPC has changed from one that would be a new vehicle for social change and to begin deep social movement building to one that needs to be opened beyond the grassroots organizations and institutions that have composed of the NPC. Although, each member of the NPC represents organizations that have served as vehicles of change for their own organizational goals and objectives, this has



stilted its growth to one that needs to incorporate individual agents of change that are also pushing for broad social economic and ecological reforms. As a member of the NPC it has been hard to take advantage and fully integrate with the People's Movement Assembly process. The NPC could serve as a way to promote the PMA's through its own processes such as regular updates on PMA's, and notifications of when and where PMA's and actions are taking place. We could also provide a structure and a platform for how to utilize the PMA's to promote the objectives of the USSF. For instance, can we elevate PMA's in certain regions, and have coordinated times of action, etc.

### **MayFirst/People Link (MF/PL)**

The NPC leads the USSF strategy and should therefore set the dates for the Social Forums, make sure the logistical arrangements are secure and efficient. This has been its traditional role and should be moving towards the proximate future. We believe the PMA is a highly dynamic and significant contribution that the USSF has made to the movement and that PMA gatherings are continuing to develop US-based movements, with the potential to also shape international movements as well. At this point, the relationship between NPC and the PMA is as it should be -- the former assists, encourages and supports the latter. This is an excellent path to continue to walk.

It is vitally important for the NPC to continue to do only what it's been doing. The structuring and facilitating work the NPC does for the Social Forum is in fact politically driven and informed. Political discussion around the work we do -- putting on the Social Forum -- is valuable and should be encouraged and enhanced. But no more. The Social Forum in and of itself must be allowed to make the organic and natural contribution it can make by bringing people in struggle together. The planning body of the forum, by the definition of its political role to create space, may mar the productive interactions and environment if it tries to add to the process by doing more.

### **Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO)**

Prior to the 2010 SF, I believed that the NPC was guided by God and was almost as powerful. During and after the SF, it moved to another place not nearly as cohesive, structured or influential. Both statements are subjective, and reflect the initial belief that the NPC was able to solve all problems, and then later it became more life-like and fallible as it looked for solutions like the rest of us. Today, I believe it to be a hopeful entity that has the capacity to be the contact points nationally that can mobilize at least the message. A better definition of what the NPC is might help along with what it isn't!

Have to think more about potential changes to how recruiting is handled. Don't know if there is a relationship between the NPC and PMA's because the PMA process locally is very engaged. Seems like the NPC is the national oversight body for the SF process that is fired up when it is time for the next SF., and the PMA's work in-between SF's to both identify and manage action steps based on political upheavals.

### **Move To Amend (MTA) Coalition**

The Move To Amend coalition is dedicated to winning a constitutional amendment to abolish the illegitimate legal doctrine of "corporate personhood" (which allows corporations to overturn democratically enacted laws designed to control them), and also the doctrine that "money equals political speech" that allows the wealthy to buy and control existing elections.

We are also eager to participate with other groups and sectors in creating a PMA process for laying the groundwork for writing an entirely new US Constitution.

There are those for whom the current Constitution holds empty, unfilled, or half manifested promises, and even those who want to belief the myth have to face the reality of life in a country whose founders never consider them of note. There no reason for that reality to continue.

Imagine those working against foreclosures demanding a constitutionally protected right to adequate housing. Those working against hunger demanding a constitutionally protected right to enough food to eat, environmentalists demanding a constitutionally protect right for nature to exist and flourish. From our perspective, this is what a non-violent revolution that takes itself seriously actually looks like.

### **People Organized To Win Employment Rights (POWER)**

For both the USSF in Atlanta in 2007 and in Detroit in 2010, our organization invested significant resources in the USSF through the National Planning Committee (NPC). The time commitment, including travel and having to put aside other organizational work is significant. We see the NPC as an important coordinative and political leadership body that helps to shape the political direction of the Forum. However, the NPC has often oscillated between being a logistical, coordinative body and a body that exercises political leadership. This has caused tension amongst Forum organizers, and at times led the NPC to be completely ineffective. It has had the effect of discouraging organizations from participating in the process.

We agree with GGJ that the purpose of the Forum is to build and create a broader unity at scale with a common enemy of neoliberal globalization. However, we also believe that there is still a deep need for Left unity amongst organizations with more explicitly revolutionary politics. We must, if we are to build to scale, build strong relationships with forces whose politics are Left of center, and deepen unity amongst Left organizations. In order to do that, we need to pay close attention to the NPC process and function. Some of the cultural characteristics that the NPC has developed over time are toxic to the process and toxic to our movement building efforts. If we do not take those on directly, and hold one another accountable with love and respect, we do not have much confidence that the number and diversity of organizations will want to participate.

To that end, there are some suggestions that we have for discussions to have / dynamics to resolve for the next USSF, be it regional or national, to continue to be successful:

*Intentional space for the NPC to engage in political discussion / dialogue:* It will be important for the NPC to not just engage one another, but to engage organizations nationally and internationally on important political questions facing our movement, to build unity and to understand clearly where we have difference, and what are the implications of that difference on our shared trajectories. This will help to facilitate the logistical processes that are necessary to make the Forum function smoothly. Clarity on political vision and approach would also help to eliminate some of the divisive dynamics that arose during both Forum processes. One such question that tends to arise that the NPC needs to have a statement on is the ongoing tension between local and national—where the dynamic arises that organizations, particularly local host organizations, call the NPC oppressive and the NPC as a body has a hard time making room for local context and culture to help shape the process overall.

*People's Movement Assemblies:* The People's Movement Assemblies are important convergence and action planning spaces. They are places where collective solutions are developed and have the potential to be implemented. Indeed, the People's Movement Assemblies have the potential to be some of the infrastructure that is created and maintained before, during, and after the USSF process. In this process, the PMAs seemed to be marginalized in ways, when they really are a central part of the process. The NPC should have more clarity in its relationship to the PMA process and the imperatives that come from them. This would help to inform the shaping of the process.

*Decision Making and Democratic Practices and Accountability:* We agree with GGJ that the National Planning Committee must be broadened beyond our political comfort zone, and that there is a role for large, national organizations who are in motion to play. In order for this to be successful, we have to clarify and align our decision-making processes and democratic practices. We also need to develop ways to hold each other accountable to what we say we will do. What are the decisions that it is appropriate / necessary for the NPC to make? What decisions are appropriate / necessary for local host organizations / anchor organizations to make? How are decisions made by the NPC in consultation and dialogue with other social movement forces?

*Quality over Quantity:* We agree with GGJ that the next forum should focus on developing people's agendas and strategies, and that to that end, we should focus on the quality of the content of the Forum as opposed to how many people can be mobilized. In doing so, we will have to pay close attention to plurality and political diversity. We should see the upcoming (?) forum as an opportunity to put forces in dialogue with one another that are not already doing so, and as an opportunity to broaden out. The forum should continue to be intentional about engaging international social movements, and connecting US based grassroots social movements to international social movements.

### **People's Institute for Society and Beyond (PISAB) - Greater New Orleans Organizers Roundtable (GNOOR)**

Sharon Handshaw (Costal Women for Change) " Seeing what it takes to pull something off like that is big. Good to know people can come together and do something like that. We can create a new world. I applaud all the behind the scenes people who make the trip and USSF possible. Lets keep elevating our work."

Rosana Cruz (Women with a Vision) "It was different from the magic in Atlanta, when we did not know what to expect. The youth space was exciting. People will bring all their stuff to an event like this and the question is know what people do, but how we respond to it. I ended up in a room of Mamas and we discussed how it is to be at the USSF either with or without our children. We were able to feel the challenges, conflict and resentments that we feel with our own people and not just folks in power."

Tiffanie Johnson (Immaculate Heart) "I learned a lot. The youth were so serious. Dealing with police officers, killing black men..... I want to see a change in my community. I learned a lot and got a chance to feel others, and how we can pull

together. And not work by ourselves. There are people you can talk to from around the world and we can help each other.”

Alex Bernadett (Tulane University) “Creating a community, whether it be through the people that shared the USSF Detroit 2010 experience or online resources, that can collaborate their ideas and similar movements.”

Andrea Slocum (Critical Resistance) I thought it was wonderful to have the PMA's and the fact that there was follow up. Beautiful.

### **Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC)**

We think there is a disconnect between the PMA process and the NPC. Somehow or another there have to be people who know what's happening on the PMA's and they have to be on the NPC or something, or there have to be reports – something's got to happen. The NPC has to play more of a role in communicating what is happening around the country so that everybody is on the same playing field. Plus, we should be having the hard conversations, assessing where we're at and disseminating that information through an online newsletter that informs people on the NPC's and PMA's understanding of what is taking place across the country. We know they have one through the World Social Forum.

### **Project South (PS)**

[Response for Questions E & F]

The Social Forum planning process must include resources and support to create and coordinate clear entry points across movements, specifically movements led by those most affected by injustice. Local, regional, and thematic Movement Assemblies and Regional Forums prepare groups, organizations, sectors, and communities to participate in the broader, national convergence with collective visions, coordinated strategies, shared experiences, and agency of leadership. Cross-movement assemblies and regional forums can establish deeper political synthesis and action plans. Prepared delegations would represent those positions, questions, needs, and ideas.

If we invest in the capacity for Peoples Movement Assemblies and Regional Forums to reach thousands of people, the larger US Social Forum will be less like a conference of activists and more like an authentic convergence of grassroots movements. But the

planning process will have to reflect a shift towards a collaborative process that is organizing people, spaces, and resources for a shared purpose.

**The next US Social Forum** – The strength of the social forum is that the convergence and planning process is a real time expression of social movements. If it becomes an institutionalized process, the forum will lose that essential characteristic. If it is solely an “open space,” it will not fulfill its mission of galvanizing political movements for just transformation. The planning for the next US Social Forum should be based on a true assessment of the stage of our movements and what we need that convergence space to be.

We propose that the US Social Forum be held every 4-5 years. We recognize that the effort is overwhelming, demands a significant amount of resources, and requires two years of concentrated planning to be as effective as possible. If Assemblies and regional forums are supported and coordinated, a more infrequent US Social Forum can be a true convergence of prepared and mobilized forces. Other opportunities that emerge within an expanded timeframe:

- Establishes a rhythm that is not about managing non-profit schedules but rather about a growing momentum that compels a different level of participation.
- Movements using the non-profit vehicle have been locked into single-year strategies and the Forum offers an opportunity to think and practice long-term sustainable planning and strategy. The Forum creates a space for clear movement benchmarks-What did we commit to? What have we achieved? The Forum can be a moment to assess and determine movement goals for the next 5 years.
- With more time and a more streamlined process, the hosting site's communities, organizations, and groups can plan effectively. Resources are less likely to be drained and the opportunities of the Forum can be leveraged to impact the local site in positive ways.
- The movement building potential of the Forum is located in all stages of the planning (before, during, and after). Each stage should be intentionally planned so that the impact can be measured.

**The responsibilities of a US Social Forum Planning Committee should be:**

- to develop a process that builds a successful Social Forum;
- to create space for movements to grow before, during, and after the Forum;
- to assess the conditions and determine potential strategic breakthroughs to organize around (as well as to anticipate counter-movement attacks and historic challenges);

- to increase access to movement spaces for all affected people;
- to generate the necessary resources for basic infrastructure and implementation; and
- to support the site (politically and structurally) so that power shifts towards justice in our communities because of the Forum's presence.

**LOCATION of the Forum should be based on** political criteria of the current moment and the political will of anchor organizations in the location. As a critical part of building cross-regional relationships and also transferring the experience and knowledge of the process, there should be clear bridges between one site and the next. The criteria that the planning committee determined in 2008 remains critical: History of economic oppression & legacy of genocide; Legacy of community building & organizing in the site/region; Anchor organization(s) committed to movement building; Existing alliances across race, generations, and organizational bases; Global issues mirrored in local issues; and Clear internal assessment of organizational capacity, leadership, political purpose, and collaborative possibilities.

**The Planning Committee's most important function** is to coordinate the organizing and planning work through representatives of that work. (Examples: The Peoples Movement Assembly process is represented by a member of the Coordination Team, Regional Social Forums are represented by a member of that particular planning committee, organizations house and represent a section of work, etc.)

**LEADERSHIP & USSF PLANNING STRUCTURE:** *(possible breakdown)*

- Representatives of site location (50%)
- Representatives of organizing process
  - o Movement Assembly representatives & Regional social forum representatives
- Anchor organization leadership from past sites
- Movement leadership from key fronts of struggle
- No more than 40% of planning body should be from previous planning committee

Contributes to a continual transfer of knowledge & experience as well as deeper leadership development that ensures generational continuity

**WORK AREAS** - Structure for planning process should be based around central functions:

**Resource Distribution** = fundraising & financial administration

**Infrastructure Development** = space, database, logistics, access, transportation, housing, health, water

**Communications/Media** = internal planning mechanisms, external entry points, language, online presence

**Political Programming** = methodologies to meet political goals within convergence spaces, actions, assemblies, workshops, plenaries, cultural integration, public space, activities

**Leadership & representatives** = coordination of work, engagement, representation, decision-making

**CONCLUSIONS:** No political party or singular alliance is prepared or willing to act on our communities' behalf. Relationship building, coordination, political integration, and collective leadership development remain the imperatives for our moment. The Social Forum process provides a productive space for leadership to stay connected to and flank rising popular movements. We learned great lessons in Atlanta and Detroit, and we can develop a stronger planning process based on those lessons. The Social Forum can be a benchmark, entry point, and transformative space for thousands. The Peoples Movement Assembly provides the opportunity for our movements to enact our principles beyond rhetoric and into meaningful action. Together, the organizing, planning, and implementation process is essential to growing our movements to the scale we need to undo capitalism and build a new world.

### **Sociologists Without Borders (SSB)/Sociologistas Sin Fronteras (SSF)**

The NPC has evolved in important ways. We need to continue to recruit or solicit nominations of groups that, on the whole, are representative of the broad constituencies the USSF hopes to reflect and that privilege the voices of those most harmed by economic globalization. We also need to find new ways to generate sustained support and commitment from groups that are not on the NPC but that commit to furthering the work of the social forums. I think the PMA process offers some ideas for expanding the work of the social forums, and we should explore further how to use this model to encourage bottom-up organizing and the expansion of the WSF/USSF organizing principles in local communities around the country. We need to encourage decentralized leadership in as many ways as we can, and we need to be deliberate about how we do this. Perhaps we can be more explicit/deliberate about this objective and charge NPC members with the task of actively advancing the models and principles of the USSF in their communities and with their constituencies.

We learned more about how to organize the particular sector of scholar-activists/academics, and we learned that the organizational vehicle (SSF) we were working through is probably not the best one for achieving the aims of the USSF.



Therefore, for future work with the USSF process, we're proposing to create a network (building upon some existing ones such as NIGD and national radical scholars/educators groups) organization that can expand the focus beyond merely sociologists to include all scholars and that is explicitly focused on the work of generating action in support of the World Social Forum process in the United States and globally.

### **U.S. Human Rights Network (USHRN)**

It is our opinion that the NPC be clear that it is and should be a political center for the Social Forum process, and not just a logistical coordinator. Implicitly it already plays this role. However, this role needs to be more fully developed and articulated, so that it's clear. We understand that in the Latin American context that this type of leadership has been avoided, in part to avoid the sectarian dynamics of the past. We share this concern, but in our own context, the process needs greater political leadership to be able to address complex questions relating to how to address liberal forces that might want to engage, and reactionary social movements like Zionism, that relate to many liberal forces that the more progressive social movements often times relate to on a tactical basis. We do not need to repeat errors such as those that occurred relating to several Zionist forces that intended on deliberately dividing the social movement on the question of Palestinian occupation.

### **U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (USSEN)**

SEN only joined the NPC in the run up to the 2010 USSF so it's hard for us to say how its role has changed. It seems to work pretty well, given the difficulties of moving effective communication among so many groups. Our understanding is that the PMA process is fairly autonomous of the NPC. Not sure that the question is how can the NPC be a better vehicle to support social movement, as much as the USSF, which the NPC animates.

### **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)**

It is unclear what role WILPF will play on the NPC now or in the future. In many ways, this depends in large part on who WILPF is. If WILPF has young women or emerging activists who can be strengthened through participation in such a body, then the USSF can be a strong resource for developing movement-building skills and relationships. On the other hand, participation on the NPC may not be the best use of the limited time and resources of our most experienced members. Regardless of our future role on the NPC, I strongly expect that WILPF members will always want to be involved in the Social Forum as participants.

***Question F: Lastly, the big one...is it time to start a discussion about a 3rd USSF, which would include talks about what should be changed and why? What form might a 3rd USSF take (regional, national), and why? What criteria might we discuss and list to help guide any discussions about if, when, and where?***

### **East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC)**

EMEAC is supportive of discussions towards a third USSF. As an organization we support the idea of polycentric or regional Social Forums to build up towards a nationwide USSF. The NPC or National Planning body should provide some guidelines, support, and resourcing towards the regional Forums so that they are not completely independent/ autonomous. They should take the USSF and the WSF as a leaping point towards innovation and regionalization. EMEAC is also concerned about sub-regionalization; meaning that even within regions there are divides. For example Will participated in a Midwest Social Forum that had great Wisconsin, Minnesota participation, some participation from Chicago, IL, a little participation from Michigan, and no participation from Ohio. The NPC could help define the regions, help use its large network to assess who is at the table and who is not so that this is not replicated and people are not left out based on geographies.

The host for the next nationwide USSF should be not just one organizations but at least two or three organizations that are willing to share the responsibilities. There should be serious discussions about how to localize the USSF so that it reflects the spirit of and meets the needs of the next hosting communities. There would be a tremendous symbolic and practical meaning towards having the next USSF in a Latino community. The first two USSF were hosted by predominantly Black communities and told the narrative of moving from Civil Rights into the Urban/ Industrial consciousness. With Latinos being the largest “minority” presence in the US, this could be a passing of the torch towards greater leadership and presence on a national scale, and also increase collaboration and communication with other grassroots groups. Secondly, in Detroit we faced major challenges with language access (during planning and organizing meetings) and also meeting the needs of undocumented individuals and groups. This would necessarily elevate these concerns to the next level and provide a powerful example of deep multicultural organizing.

We are mindful that there are groups and organizations listed as members of the original NPC that were not on the recent NPC conference call. We will intentionally reached out to them to determine their on-going interest in continued participation in whatever entity comes out of these next set of upcoming sessions. Finally, additional

process issues, NPC travel protocols, invitee issues, and structural questions will be sent in a separate email.

### **Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ) Alliance**

[Response for Questions E & F]

Because of all of the forces in motion throughout the United States, a third USSF could be useful in the near future. The USSF could still provide the broad tent that could be a good point of convergence for the 99% movement, the grassroots organizing sector and new efforts like the New Bottom Line and the Rebuild the Dream formation. Along with stronger representation from labor this range of forces with some strategic outcomes in mind could have a major impact on the national political landscape, and represent a strong united front against capital and the Right.

The spring of 2013 could be an ideal time - in the wake of the National Elections as the new administration takes power (or the current one continues). It will be a good moment for social movements to develop strategies for the coming 4 years and beyond. The question is whether there is the political interest and capacity of the movements to organize another USSF, and whether it would be viewed as the appropriate vehicle for the moment.

But there should be a few criteria we should incorporate learning from the lessons of the previous forums:

- ***The National Planning Committee must be broadened beyond our political comfort zone.*** We should continue to maintain the central leadership of the grassroots movements with people of color, poor whites, women, queers, youth, Indigenous peoples, the disabled community, the homeless and others, but we must allow space for large, national organizations who are also in motion and who are interested in building a broader progressive movement. We also have to be creative about how the NPC engages in the planning process the growing autonomous occupy sector.
- ***National organizations, networks and alliances may have to play a bigger role in organizing a USSF.*** Local organizations who served on the NPC struggled with capacity in both 2007 and 2010. Several organizations did not join the NPC until a year or less prior to the event. In conversations with many GGJ groups that were part of the founding of the USSF are most likely stepping back from the NPC.

- ***We need strong anchor organizations with capacity and a history of working together locally.*** The intensity and pressure of organizing a USSF can strain relationships and the capacity of local groups. We need to build where we are strong so that we don't strain local organizations.
- ***Scale should not be a priority.*** The success of the next USSF should not be gauged by the number of people who attend. There should be more focus, fewer workshops, sharper debates and plenaries. The emphasis should be on developing peoples' agendas and strategies.
- ***Building on what's in motion.*** 2012 will continue to be a time of resistance. This anti- corporate, pro-democracy movement is developing and growing. The organizing strategy should be to build on the convergences and convenings that are already happening. We don't need to start from scratch because the social forum now has recognition and we need to change how we mobilize towards the USSF. We need to evaluate the efficacy of constituent/issue based working groups and build participation in each of the working groups (logistics, communications, program, technology, etc) so that they bring functionality to the event.
- ***Strengthening communications infrastructure:***
  - Tools and resources should be available to help people mobilize. For instance, the question of the list-serves and what information is available from the database, who manages, etc. should be determined in advance.
  - Communications infrastructure should be developed beforehand and utilized at the forum. People should also be able to know immediately after the forum how they can access these resources.
  - Resolutions/platforms, agendas should be published immediately and a plan should be determined in advance of the USSF of how these platforms will be further debated, endorsed and published.
- ***Regrounding the role of the NPC.*** We need to elevate the expectations of NPC member responsibilities in terms of fundraising, outreach, active participation in a working group. The organizing philosophy of the planning body should be how we build and are responsible the whole and the success of the event and ensuring the needs of the process are what dictate priorities and resource allocation.

### **International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN)**

Already answered [in previous questions]

## **Jubilee USA Network**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> USSF should take a national stage once again. One of the most beautiful experiences was hearing of the people's journey to get to the social forum. The scholarships, housing, and logistical support made it possible for people of all income levels to be able to participate in the process. The USSF should continue to be a platform where people from all over the country can continue to meet and elevate their regional interests into a national platform.

Furthermore, criteria should be developed by the attendees who were so invested in the last social forum. Since, we have been able to gather most of their contact information, perhaps we can turn over the major decisions of venue, criteria, and survey the participants to see which would be most viable for them to be engaged in the process for the 3<sup>rd</sup> USSF. In addition to the participants input, we should see which locations/venues are in most need of the many gifts that the USSF can bring. The USSF truly belonged in Detroit last year and served as a representation of the change that can stem out of individuals who wish to build a new foundation over the rubble that economic exploitation wrought. The work projects, attention to local issues, and highlighting the needs of Detroit came at a critical time for that city and offered a moment of change that every attendee was proud to participate in. We must ask ourselves as the economic crisis in our country continues, where is that ground zero for change now? Which communities need the social and economic benefits of hosting the social forum? And when we do this – how is it done effectively as to support their movements and organizing, and not detract or take away their own localized movement's energy, at the same time.

## **League of Revolutionaries for a New America (LRNA)**

[Response includes Questions C & F: "relevant, does not answer directly."]

1000 threads of connectivity relate the occupy motion with the social forum and movement assembly processes, and the Zapatista inspiration and influence – from the organizational form of autonomous, horizontal communities and spaces self-organized by collective leadership connected to each other and the world by social media, to declarations summing up analyses and visions of another way of being and moving in the world, to embracing the call for "another world is possible."

As USSF organizers we have gained valuable experience from USSF 2007 and 2010, and the movement has picked up speed. The US Social Forum and Peoples Movement

Assembly embody an intentionality that ensured a collective leadership that was diverse – people of color, women, queer, and working class – and a breadth across many fronts of struggle.

***Within this political context, what do we need to concentrate on now that we are no longer trying to spark the movement?***

We need to make an in depth assessment of the movement and the social forum within the overall revolutionary process to figure out where the movement is and where it needs to go. We also, as the NPC, need to struggle for political clarity for ourselves as the national planning body and actors within the larger movement, as well as for movement convergence across the diverse fronts of struggle engaged in the social forum and movement assembly process.

Two developments we should take note of. 1. A substantial number of white folks are now realizing that the system (global capitalism and the corporate state) is screwing them too; and despite their education and privilege, their future is bleak. 2. The objective crisis has been in place and the mass movement is beginning to take off.

Work within the mass movement has to be about going from spontaneity to consciousness – and from social consciousness to class consciousness. A critical next step is developing a mass consciousness raising project – understanding systemic root causes, visions, and engaging in daily practice to make all this happen. The USSF and PMA process have to relate to this task, as well as the task of developing organizational relationships to the many motions and fronts of struggle.

This also means we have to set up within the NPC/PMA a political education process to prepare ourselves for these tasks.

The social forum and movement assembly process can provide the context for the development of a relationship between the occupy motion and other fronts of social struggle, and the further consolidation of all fronts of struggle into an organizational structure that is politically consciousness and thus independent of the ruling class and the corporations. Practically this means creating the conditions for the movement process to move from defensive and scattered social struggles toward a more united political struggle.

Social movements are creating an alter-globalization from below, and because of electronic technology we can produce an abundance of all the things humanity requires to satisfy our needs. The vision of an egalitarian, cooperative and peaceful society in

which production, distribution and consumption are organized to meet human needs and to protect the planet is possible and necessary. In social struggle new forms of self-organizing and horizontal processes of collective leadership and consensus are being practiced. Over the centuries social movements did not resolve the systemic problems of exploitation, poverty, oppression, and war at their root, leaving this unfinished task to social movements in this historic moment.

***The US Social Forum and Peoples Movement Assembly process needs to step up and take its place in history. The moment is urgent and the opportunities are great. Do we have the organization and people in place to make it a reality? Make it happen!***

### **MayFirst/People Link (MF/PL)**

When the social forum was born more than 10 years ago, it was revolutionary because it brought social movements together from around the world. Today, simply bringing everyone together is no longer enough; we must focus our movements regionally and thematically in order to achieve our goals. Where large funders have traditionally supported forum processes, today the economic crisis has severely impacted the financial support for all movement-building work, including international summits like the social forum. And what is possible technologically today like blogging, podcasting, and even live video streaming has been developed and utilized by movements over the past 10 years to meet the needs of international convergences.

We believe the next Social Forum should be made up of about four or five regional Social Forums taking place simultaneously within the US. This is the idea put forward by our Co-Director Alfredo Lopez at the last NPC meeting. Three developments, mentioned briefly before, encourage us in this direction:

The political situation in this country is acquiring a much more "regional" and "struggle-specific" nature. The alignment and cohesion of forces is taking place around these magnets, precluding any kind of larger, national identity for movements. There is even a regional nature to the Occupy movement which is one of the most "national" movements in recent history. Additionally, many developments are taking place that challenge the idea of borders and the very idea of a United States. For example, is the Southwest a region of the US or part of a region that reaches across the border and include portions of Mexico?



We don't have the money to put on a national Social Forum. Even if we could raise a few million dollars, many question the real value of this effort. To project a national Social Forum and then fail because we can't raise the money would be devastating. On the other hand, the announcement of innovative regionally-based events around the country can attract some national funding that can be shared, regional funding (or funding from funders who concentrate on local activity), and individual and organizational fund-raising. In any case, localized events are cheaper than national ones and more additive to local organization's capacities in the long term.

We have the technology to do a national convergence of local or regional events. Each region could, for instance, do a full day of local events and then converge, through streaming, for a national event in the evening (or a combination national and regional events). All kinds of combinations are possible including international participation, cross-border participation from South and North, and participation by people who can't physically attend any of the Forums. All of this is now possible. We also believe that this form of remote and local convergences are becoming more common, showing us the future of international movement-building with the use of Internet tools.

### **Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO)**

Given the critical nature of the condition of the country and the world, I believe it is time to initiate SF discussions which must include structural changes and why. I support regional SF's that are planned in preparation for a national event. I further believe that said discussions should officially start soon with specific dates for timelines set throughout 2012, with a potential 3<sup>rd</sup> USSF considered for 2013/2014 in South Dakota or places nearby where we can focus on Indigenous People. Capitalism is collapsing. Should those of us who appreciate this fact position ourselves to be influential in which way – left or right, that society turns? I believe we have no choice but to take that step that helps create the vision of the world we want to live in! ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE! ANOTHER US IS NECESSARY!

### **Move To Amend (MTA) Coalition**

Ideally, we advocate for helping to convene a series of regional USSF gatherings that culminate in a national USSF. There really is no substitute for the energy, enthusiasm and camaraderie that was created in Atlanta and Detroit. Let's keep building!

We are grateful for the efforts to engage with community grassroots media, and would like to see that begin even sooner if possible. We would also like to see efforts to break

into corporate media.

We would also like to develop a strategy to engage and encourage the participation of those who support and/or participate in the OWS movement.

Finally we feel it's important to nail down any possibility of using collective resources to buy homes/facilities in the host city, with ownership transferred to grassroots organizations at the conclusion of the USSF. We must resource our movement!

### **People Organized To Win Employment Rights (POWER)**

[Response for questions C & F]

As the global crises of empire, economy and ecology are exacerbated, there is a specific role that the Social Forum process can play within US social movement building and in relationship to the World Social Forums or international social movement building processes. We think that the Social Forum can help our developing social movements cohere and potentially federate into larger, multi-sector and multi-issue movements that embrace plurality yet have significant impact. We do think that it is time to start a discussion about a third USSF, which would include discussion and debate about the necessary transformations in the process. We are not firm on the question of whether or not the Forums should take a regional or national form. Regional forums can build infrastructure and combat isolation, particularly in locations where social movement infrastructure is challenged. National forums can help to build infrastructure and facilitate convergence and coordination. Both are necessary outcomes, regardless of the form. And both are necessary in this current political moment. The biggest questions, in our opinion, facing the National Planning Committee (NPC) and the USSF are the questions of what function or outcome is possible from the USSF in this political moment, whether or not our forces are in a position to achieve this outcome, and how to build the infrastructure necessary to advance our goals. While the USSF is an important part of this equation, it is not all of it.

## **People's Institute for Society and Beyond (PISAB) - Greater New Orleans Organizers Roundtable (GNOOR)**

The Greater New Orleans supports another USSF.

Derek Rankins (People's Institute for Survival and Beyond/ Students Organizing Against Racism) - "A question with 2 question: Have we built that powerful multi-racial, multi-sectoral, inter-generational, diverse, inclusive, internationalist movement that transforms this country and changes history? Have we come to that other World that is possible, and has that other Necessary US come? The United States Social Forum should gather until the answer of BOTH of these questions are YES!!!"

Alex Bernadett (Tulane University) "A USSF 2012 in the same timeframe as USSF Detroit 2010 (i.e. June) would be an ideal time for the USSF to convene. The format of the event should continue to stress the importance of networking with other community organizers during the forum and maintain a relationship with those networks and individuals after the forum."

Andrea Slocum (Critical Resistance) Yes, of course. I would add guides for what your interested in. There is a word out there for it but I can't think of it right now. Example; I'm interested in Reproductive Justice. There would be a guide as to what is being presented on this topic and putting these at the check in table.

## **Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC)**

We definitely think there should be a third Social Forum! This is a big country and the USSF played an important role for all the people that have been developing and working on their work that came out of the first two Social Forums, so why wouldn't we do that for a whole other section of the population?

We think that the next USSF should be more like immersions for best practices and do what we've done before. But because of what's happening in this country there's a whole other level of questions. We didn't have this whole Occupy process. We didn't have a situation where the little bit of benefits that people had across this country, they don't have them anymore. So this calls for new tools.

We have to deal with the question of electoral politics and power, if we're serious about power in this country. And there has to be much more cross-fertilizing between young people and our elders – not just as cultural diversity. There's a lot of impatience

between these two groups and it's huge. We see this and we see stupid things happening around the country; we try to tell different Occupy folks that we have a relationship with to really stop and think about this. In Philly there are old school, civil rights folks who are 75 years old – they must know something. We feel strong about this piece. It's wonderful that young people have woken up in this country and are pissed off and see that they have no future and they want to go forward. But what are we doing about transferring the kind of knowledge that people have from their experiences in this country?

### **Poverty Working Group (PWG)**

YES it is imperative to have another national social forum, but we believe it is imperative to support the kind of **regional and sector organizing** that will ensure that a national gathering support the kind of **inclusiveness** and **skill-building** we need to expand our movement.

Regional organizing should happen in a more intentional way, stimulated and supported by the national assembly where it is weak or non-existent.

By inclusiveness we mean, of course, that resources must be allocated to include people living in poverty at every stage of the planning of the forum(s).

We would like to see more emphasis on and opportunity for skill-building sessions at the next forum(s), with particular emphasis on the need and skills for moving individuals and groups from a reformist to a “transformist” political vision, and for building independent political motions to realize that vision.

### **Project South (PS)**

[Response for Questions E & F]

The Social Forum planning process must include resources and support to create and coordinate clear entry points across movements, specifically movements led by those most affected by injustice. Local, regional, and thematic Movement Assemblies and Regional Forums prepare groups, organizations, sectors, and communities to participate in the broader, national convergence with collective visions, coordinated strategies, shared experiences, and agency of leadership. Cross-movement assemblies and regional forums can establish deeper political synthesis and action plans. Prepared delegations would represent those positions, questions, needs, and ideas.

If we invest in the capacity for Peoples Movement Assemblies and Regional Forums to reach thousands of people, the larger US Social Forum will be less like a conference of activists and more like an authentic convergence of grassroots movements. But the planning process will have to reflect a shift towards a collaborative process that is organizing people, spaces, and resources for a shared purpose.

**The next US Social Forum** – The strength of the social forum is that the convergence and planning process is a real time expression of social movements. If it becomes an institutionalized process, the forum will lose that essential characteristic. If it is solely an “open space,” it will not fulfill its mission of galvanizing political movements for just transformation. The planning for the next US Social Forum should be based on a true assessment of the stage of our movements and what we need that convergence space to be.

We propose that the US Social Forum be held every 4-5 years. We recognize that the effort is overwhelming, demands a significant amount of resources, and requires two years of concentrated planning to be as effective as possible. If Assemblies and regional forums are supported and coordinated, a more infrequent US Social Forum can be a true convergence of prepared and mobilized forces. Other opportunities that emerge within an expanded timeframe:

- Establishes a rhythm that is not about managing non-profit schedules but rather about a growing momentum that compels a different level of participation.
- Movements using the non-profit vehicle have been locked into single-year strategies and the Forum offers an opportunity to think and practice long-term sustainable planning and strategy. The Forum creates a space for clear movement benchmarks-What did we commit to? What have we achieved? The Forum can be a moment to assess and determine movement goals for the next 5 years.
- With more time and a more streamlined process, the hosting site’s communities, organizations, and groups can plan effectively. Resources are less likely to be drained and the opportunities of the Forum can be leveraged to impact the local site in positive ways.
- The movement building potential of the Forum is located in all stages of the planning (before, during, and after). Each stage should be intentionally planned so that the impact can be measured.

**The responsibilities of a US Social Forum Planning Committee should be:**

- to develop a process that builds a successful Social Forum;
- to create space for movements to grow before, during, and after the Forum;

- to assess the conditions and determine potential strategic breakthroughs to organize around (as well as to anticipate counter-movement attacks and historic challenges);
- to increase access to movement spaces for all affected people;
- to generate the necessary resources for basic infrastructure and implementation; and
- to support the site (politically and structurally) so that power shifts towards justice in our communities because of the Forum's presence.

**LOCATION of the Forum should be based on** political criteria of the current moment and the political will of anchor organizations in the location. As a critical part of building cross-regional relationships and also transferring the experience and knowledge of the process, there should be clear bridges between one site and the next. The criteria that the planning committee determined in 2008 remains critical: History of economic oppression & legacy of genocide; Legacy of community building & organizing in the site/region; Anchor organization(s) committed to movement building; Existing alliances across race, generations, and organizational bases; Global issues mirrored in local issues; and Clear internal assessment of organizational capacity, leadership, political purpose, and collaborative possibilities.

**The Planning Committee's most important function** is to coordinate the organizing and planning work through representatives of that work. (Examples: The Peoples Movement Assembly process is represented by a member of the Coordination Team, Regional Social Forums are represented by a member of that particular planning committee, organizations house and represent a section of work, etc.)

**LEADERSHIP & USSF PLANNING STRUCTURE:** *(possible breakdown)*

- Representatives of site location (50%)
- Representatives of organizing process
  - o Movement Assembly representatives & Regional social forum representatives
- Anchor organization leadership from past sites
- Movement leadership from key fronts of struggle
- No more than 40% of planning body should be from previous planning committee

Contributes to a continual transfer of knowledge & experience as well as deeper leadership development that ensures generational continuity

**WORK AREAS** - Structure for planning process should be based around central functions:

**Resource Distribution** = fundraising & financial administration

**Infrastructure Development** = space, database, logistics, access, transportation, housing, health, water

**Communications/Media** = internal planning mechanisms, external entry points, language, online presence

**Political Programming** = methodologies to meet political goals within convergence spaces, actions, assemblies, workshops, plenaries, cultural integration, public space, activities

**Leadership & representatives** = coordination of work, engagement, representation, decision-making

**CONCLUSIONS:** No political party or singular alliance is prepared or willing to act on our communities' behalf. Relationship building, coordination, political integration, and collective leadership development remain the imperatives for our moment. The Social Forum process provides a productive space for leadership to stay connected to and flank rising popular movements. We learned great lessons in Atlanta and Detroit, and we can develop a stronger planning process based on those lessons. The Social Forum can be a benchmark, entry point, and transformative space for thousands. The Peoples Movement Assembly provides the opportunity for our movements to enact our principles beyond rhetoric and into meaningful action. Together, the organizing, planning, and implementation process is essential to growing our movements to the scale we need to undo capitalism and build a new world.

### **Sociologists Without Borders (SSB)/Sociologistas Sin Fronteras (SSF)**

There were some great ideas discussed at the NPC meeting following the USSF. There was a good idea of organizing some sort of forum that would build upon and draw from the lessons the ICT team helped us learn about the potential for using technology to overcome the costs of transporting people to a single site.

Perhaps we can try this out with the aim of building the “people’s platform” discussed above—organize a conversation about the issues that are missing from the debates. We could do an online shadow debate in fact, that wouldn’t feature individuals but rather would be a conversation or speak-out to raise up the concerns and needs of people in our communities. This wouldn’t take the place of a social forum, but it could help us learn about the possibilities for using technology to expand conversations and collaborations across large distances (and differences).

The actual national gatherings of the USSF are great, and they serve a purpose. But they have been taxing on the local teams, so we need to figure out ways to avoid this. One important need is to be more deliberate about volunteer recruitment and coordination. We need to start this much earlier and probably do more to help train people to be movement leaders.

We might use the PMA process to encourage local conversations that we help link to regional assemblies that then build the support and the networks to carry out an effective (and non-exploitative) national forum.

Another idea is for the USSF to discuss at our January 2012 meeting the idea of calling for a national conference call of occupy site/organizations to discuss strategy. Perhaps we can put out a working paper of ideas about movement building in the US that come from our experiences with USSF. Some concrete proposals to help the distinctive occupy fronts come together in a nationally focused effort would be powerful, and the USSF process is a good infrastructure in which this might happen.

### **U.S. Human Rights Network (USHRN)**

We think there should be a 3<sup>rd</sup> Social Forum. And we think it should be driven more by the People's Assembly process in terms of its structure and orientation. Meaning we think this Social Forum should aim to produce some tangible political objectives that are driven by the Assembly process. Also, we think it should be national, and we think it should be hosted on an Indigenous reservation in line with our trajectory around hosting the Forums in locations with concentrated colonized and oppressed peoples. We recognize that an Indigenous nation would need to be open to this suggestion and it is not something that the forum can or should impose. If there are no nations willing to take this on (for whatever reason), then we would suggest that the next Forum be held somewhere in the Southwest Border region.

### **U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (USSEN)**

Yes, we should have one. It would be great to structure it such that some strategies and next steps can emerge. These can be plural (ie. don't have to just have one strategy) and don't have to happen in the name of the USSF. I know that the PMAs are an attempt to make this happen and though the 2010 PMA improved in the 2007 one, we should explore other creative approaches.

Clearly the top topics will focus on 'Whither OWS?', the 2012 grassroots election efforts, the ongoing economic justice fightback, the insurgent student movement, ending the



wars and preventing new ones, proposals for radical structural reform/transformation and the development of revolutionary strategies, practices and organizations. The best way to frame the discussion is to take the questions that emerge in real life, then explore the whole from the part, and the future from the present.

### **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)**

[Response for questions D & F]

As we look toward the future of movement-building, WILPF generally feels that the USSF should not be involved in electoral politics from the perspective of endorsing candidates or allowing them to speak at USSF. However, it may be appropriate for the USSF to debate the role electoral politics plays during this significant time, and what should the role of progressives and “the left” be in electoral politics and the 2012 elections. Additionally, WILPF suggests that the next Social Forum be held in 2013, just after the next elections. We were too slow to adjust our strategies to the realities of the Obama administration. Holding the USSF in 2013 will help movement organizations reorient to the political conditions more quickly and get a collective sense of what our tasks should be post election and in light of the economic crisis. There needs to be more national and regional dialogue about what role the USSF process plays in the political situation we are in now, and how it can push forward the building of strategic relations among organizations in the U.S., as well as internationally. Additionally, there has to be more transparency within the NPC, and with the NPC and other organizations that we wish to draw into the process. If the USSF were to formalize a three-year cycle, regional and even local social forums could be encouraged during the off years. The negotiations and logistical struggles of putting together a social forum can be building blocks for further collaborations, if handled well – a sort of short-term trial of new working relationships. The advantage of proliferating social forums is that the movement-building and educational format can, through increased mobility, be accessible to ever more people.

## APPENDIX

### **People's Movement Assembly (PMA) Proposal to NPC**

#### **PMA 2012-13 / PROPOSAL to NPC USSF III**

*"We believe that we can build our collective power through participation in political education and organizing collective action. We can each realize the power that resides within each one of us and build collective power by participating in the fronts of struggle recognized through the People's Movement Assemblies. Let us unite and create a better world for all future living generations." From the Preamble of the National Social Movement Agenda, drafted by the Synthesis Commission participating in the Synthesis Assembly, presented to the National PMA on June 26, 2010.*

#### **Principle assumption & agreement**

We believe that when people come together in shared space in order to share knowledge and make shared decisions, we can determine the collective paths forward to developing a new world. The convergence methodology of the Social Forum is complemented and strengthened by the convergence synthesis of the Peoples Movement Assembly.

#### **PMA goals**

The PMA will 'converge' people and social movements along the lines of the national agenda of social movements developed in 2010 in Detroit as a critical part of the organizing process to mobilize and prepare for the USSF III, in addition to building stronger foundations for social movement development.

Assemblies will 'converge' people and social movements along the lines of multiple fronts of struggle, including those articulated at the National Movement Assembly at the USSF II in Detroit. Specific communities and sites planning movement assembly processes in 2012 (*that we know of at this time*):

- **Formerly Incarcerated Peoples Movement - held 2 national assemblies in 2011**
- **Detroit City-wide PMAs, including Food Justice – held PMA in April 2011**
- **Youth PMAs in the South & Southwest – held PMAs in July & August**
- **Latino PMA (anchored by PCUN in the NW) – held PMA in August**
- **Chicago Coalition of LGBTQ organizations (anchored by Affinity)**
- **Cross-regional Queer Left PMA to be held at Creating Change, national conference of NGLTF (anchored by Project South and SONG)**
- **Palestinian Movement Assemblies (anchored by US Palestinian Community Network)**
- **Assembly to End Poverty (anchored by the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization)**
- **Virginia Assembly (in Richmond)**
- **Healing Justice Assemblies (anchored by Kindred Collective)**
- **National Student Bill of Rights (anchored by a coalition of youth and education justice organizations)**

- **Southern Movement Alliance PMAs (planned for LA, AR, AL, and GA)**
- **People's Assemblies for the People's Economy (anchored by Grassroots Global Justice)**

### **Structural Considerations**

The PMA Working Group will manage three teams: Strategy, Communications, & Organizing/Facilitation Support. The Working Group will include representatives from all of the organizing processes in motion. The PMA Working Group would hold a representative seat with the Planning Committee for the USSF III and the Organizing committee (of working groups) with an alternate.

The PMA will 'converge' people and social movement organizational representatives to serve on PMA Working Group for the USSF III to expand the base and participation on PMA process regionally, locally and nationally on the road to USSF III. As regional social forums and assembly processes move forward, the PMA Working Group will make recommendations for representatives to be part of the USSF Planning Committee.

### **2012 Plan Outline**

Focus: Before, During and After Presidential elections Nov 6, 2012

- Disseminate PMA Organizing Kit – online & hard copy dissemination based on NPC members and PMA representatives
- Working group meeting of PMA representatives (March)
- Support planning of assemblies throughout the Spring and Summer
  - o Ongoing communications and connection to occupy moment, as relevant
- Summer Organizing Drives
- Fall elections strategies – creative actions at the polls and invitation to assemblies after the elections (to continue community-based governance practices)
- Post- election analysis, evaluation, and strategy development for 2013

### **PMA Proposal to US Social Forum Process 2013**

Because the United States presidential elections are coming up in 2012, and because more than just electioneering is at stake in the upcoming elections; at stake is the country's direction and core values. People or corporations rule? Never has the question been clearer; people versus profits. The PMA plan proposes a Before, During, and After the US Presidential elections with a focus on building community governance, democratic practices led by the grassroots forces, and coordinated actions developed within the assemblies. Starting in 2012, the PMA will make a national call for action via PMA's and a working group will assist in the coordination and expansion of the radius of PMA's territory. The focus is not the elections per se but the mobilizing of the grassroots social movements power, convergence, and action and the expansion of our power base. What is the political moment in the United States today? How many PMA's can be organized before the elections to develop the PMA national social movements with unity and capable of social change impact? What are the strategic

points of opportunity for systemic social change? How do we measure our power and thus our impact and the social changes enacted?

The Before process has the goal of developing a 'convergent articulation' that leads to solutions and action. The During plan of action is what are we doing during the elections not just that day but weeks before? What are we saying? How are we articulating the elections and issues at hand? The After plan involves 2 major strategies 1) implementing and amplifying the community agendas developed before the elections and 2) a PMA evaluation process to analyze where we are at after the elections and the meaning of it all.

The PMA co-chairs propose this before, during and after plan to lay the groundwork for the massive mobilization and national convergence at the US Social Forum III. The Planning Committee for the USSF III should consider organizing it in the Southwest and in Indigenous Country. We need to revisit the Atlanta situation at the first national PMA by focusing on Indigenous sovereignty and undoing colonialism. Because of the previous experiences, the People's Movement Assembly is positioned to manifest this plan of action that provides continuity for the movement building work of the US Social Forum as a dynamic and historic convergence space over the next period in 2012-2013.

### **Background: How we got here?**

The Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA) came to the United States alongside the arrival of the first social forum process starting in 2003. It was a movement assembly at the end of the Roots Cause March against the Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTAA) that became a moment where the grassroots people of color global justice base consolidated as a movement in the US. The proposal for the first US Social Forum also was submitted in Miami in the same year a few months earlier. Both events became pivotal changes as was participation in the World Social Forum III via the organizing of Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ). The battle against the WTO in Cancun happened at this same time. The Southeast Social Forum and the Border Social Forum, preludes to the first ever US Social Forum in Atlanta 07 both instituted Peoples Movement Assembly. In the Southeast it was the Black & Brown dialogues and on the border it was global south & north connections as social movements without borders.

The first ever US Social Forum held a PMA which almost did not happen because it ended having to work with a few hours on a Sunday Morning the last day of the USSF. This forced the organizers to limit to two minutes per organizational resolution to the assembly. The microphone was yanked away from a Indigenous person who jump the line, and Indigenous and other people took over the stage in protest. After negotiating the PMA continued after a drumming, blessing and an articulation by Native Americans leaders of the 500 year old struggle that often get ignored by the social movements. The main lesson for the PMA process was that the PMA could not be just a short event but needed to be a process based on convergence and integration of people and movements into the process of organizing and mobilizing for the social forum giving it

content and action via the PMA. When we planned the PMA process for the USSF II in Detroit, we organized and carried out a 'before' PMA process; a during the USSF PMA process; and after the USSF the 'after' plan for the PMA process. The bet of focusing on the PMA process paid off when some 40 PMA's took place before the USSF II, and 54 PMA's took place during the three day USSF II, and after the USSF II, both the Southeast and the Southwest have organized PMA organizing drives with many successes nationally as well. By now tens and tens of thousands of people have participated in a PMA. Moreover, the success of the PMA resides on coming out with the synthesis statement reflecting all the resolutions adopted, and accumulated knowledge on how to work with the open space process of the social forum for debate, deliberation, articulation and shared knowledge but at the same time underlining the need for the peoples movement assembly to make decisions and take action. A tool kit was developed and massively distributed and in use.

### **Center for Media Justice (CMJ) – additional submission**

<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2011/12/09-1?print>

Published on Friday, December 9, 2011 by **Extra!**

#### **Media Justice and the 99 Percent Movement How net neutrality helped Occupy Wall Street by Betty Yu**

It all started with one message posted on a blog on July 13, 2011. The magazine Adbusters, a not-for-profit, reader-supported, 120,000-circulation magazine that combats corporate consumerism, issued a call:

“On September 17, we want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months. Once there, we shall incessantly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices.”

On September 17, a thousand people marched to Wall Street, and then hundreds stayed to occupy Liberty Plaza in New York’s Financial District.

Even after a solid two weeks of this Occupation, corporate media largely blacked it out. What coverage there was depicted protesters as drug-abusing hippies (the Fox News spin—Hannity, 10/10/11), or, in the “liberal” version, as directionless naifs with no message (New York Times, **9/23/11**). As the OWS Declaration in New York City put it, the 1 percent “purposefully keep people misinformed and fearful through their control of the media.”

But grassroots, independent media outlets like Democracy Now!, Pacifica Radio, the Independent newspapers and public access TV channels, with a combined audience of

millions, covered the Occupation from the perspective of the people—the 99 percent. These independent outlets provided a platform for protesters to talk about why they were supporting the Occupation—speaking out about rising unemployment, declining wages, diminishing quality of life, foreclosures, education budget cuts, lack of healthcare and unjust wars, just to name a few.

What elevated the activism to a national and global movement, though, was the sophisticated and widespread use of social media. Independent mediamakers, citizen journalists, everyday people with camera phones were capturing the voices and faces of this burgeoning movement and uploading them to YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, mostly within minutes of being captured. Group text-messaging was used to share information and media quickly.

These tools for instant communication not only helped to mobilize thousands to marches and events, but also captured police brutality toward the protesters. It was only when images were disseminated of a senior New York City police official pepper-spraying peaceful women protesters, temporarily blinding them, that corporate media began paying attention. The pepper-spraying incident was documented by fellow protesters and uploaded to YouTube—where it was viewed more than 2 million times—then posted on Facebook and tweeted to be shared with the world.

In the age of digital media, anyone with an Internet connection can watch OWS's General Assembly meeting on the livestream of the Occupy website. They can share an Occupy update on Facebook, or tweet it on Twitter—providing an ongoing venue for people to show support and participate virtually in the protests. One Tumblr site houses the stories of thousands of supporters who share why they are a part of the 99 percent, holding up handwritten signs and telling their stories.

Of course, human, face-to-face interaction and relationship-building is irreplaceable. Social media have helped get people out of their nests and into the streets of Liberty Plaza and elsewhere, to attend a General Assembly or a working group meeting. In New York, the working groups, many of them self-organized, have grown from 10 to over 70, largely through outreach done on the Internet. People in nearly 900 cities formed MeetUp.com groups, using the OccupyTogether.org website as their central hub.

The democratization of media-making tools, particularly an open and unfettered Internet, has made all this possible. Right now, though, this open access is under threat. Network neutrality is the principle that requires Internet service providers to treat all content equally, guaranteeing a level playing field for all websites and Internet technologies.

Since the invention of the Internet, net neutrality has facilitated democratic participation, allowing social justice organizations, cultural workers, citizen journalists, artists and small businesses to create, share and receive information freely. Right now, the livestream of Occupy Wall Street downloads just as quickly as the website of Goldman

Sachs. Without net neutrality, small businesses, nonprofits and individuals who can't afford high-speed services would have their ability to reach a mass audience online severely limited.

The telecommunications corporations that provide Internet connections, like AT&T, Verizon and Comcast, want to increase their already mammoth profits by controlling websites, video, content and applications. These corporations want their own sites and services to be easily available to the public, while slowing down access to those owned by their competitors—or by independent groups who can't afford to pay the gatekeepers' tolls.

In December 2010, the Federal Communications Commission issued new rules on net neutrality that were a devastating blow to media democracy. Labeled “fake net neutrality” by media justice advocates, the new regulations have no real enforcement mechanism. Worse yet, they provide zero protection for wireless devices—the mobile devices that have been so vital in the OWS movement for documenting police misconduct and spreading the word. As Extra! went to press, the Senate was considering a “resolution of disapproval” that would effectively remove all existing protections for Internet users and give unrestricted power to corporations like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon.

The communities that will be most affected by the lack of wireless net neutrality provisions are low-income and people of color. A recent Pew Center study (7/7/10) showed that nearly two-thirds of people of color, mainly Latinos and African-Americans, access the Internet through their phones.

One of the biggest media justice fights now is to break up the emerging duopoly between AT&T and Verizon, potentially controlling 80 percent of the mobile market. In March 2011, AT&T announced plans to acquire T-Mobile USA for \$39 billion. The loss of a low-cost wireless carrier like T-Mobile threatens to limit affordable mobile broadband access and stifle competition in the broadband market—making the absence of net neutrality protections for wireless devices even more problematic.

It's clear how vital the mobile Internet has been to Occupy Wall Street and the flourishing global Occupy movement. But an open Internet is also a basic communication right. In a 21st century digital age, access to jobs, healthcare, housing, government assistance and education require Internet access.

This is not just an isolated issue about media policy—it is a social justice, civil rights and human rights issue. This is about the lives of the 99 percent.

*Betty Yu, a longtime social justice organizer, media activist, educator and filmmaker, is the national organizer at the **Center for Media Justice**. She coordinates the Media Action Grassroots Network (**MAGNet**), a national coalition of over 120 social justice, community, arts and culture organizations working for media justice.*