

Massachusetts Global Action

Events at the United States Social Forum

June 27 – July 1, 2007, Atlanta, Georgia

The USSF marks a significant milestone in the World Social Forum process: it is the first *national* forum in the United States. Moreover, under the initial guidance of the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, the USSF is a genuine expression of the organizing capacity of grassroots communities of color, working class and immigrant organizations. The Forum has also prioritized the active involvement of young people and the First Nations. In the process, hundreds of organizations and movements have been drawn into the process... ourselves among them!

Massachusetts Global Action (itself born of a similar albeit much smaller effort, the Boston Social Forum, 2004) has participated in a modest way, limited only by resources, in the organizing of the USSF since August 2005. One of our projects, the North American Alliance for Fair Employment is a member of the USSF's National Planning Committee. Our staff and board—especially Kim Foltz, Susie Husted and Suren Moodliar—have also been involved at the Northeast regional level.

Now we have a chance to enjoy the forum via a number of events that we are helping organize. The following list of workshops represents a wide range of topics and collaborations. This is consistent with MGA's broad concern with corporate globalization and democratic alternatives. It also represents our belief that strategic collaborations are necessary to mobilize the kinds of energy needed to bring about progressive social change. There are a total of 6 workshops in which we will have a significant role, including 3 directly sponsored and organized by MGA.

Topic – Water

1. The Color of Water

<http://www.ussf2007.org/en/node/5015>

While the Human Right to Water (HRW) is a widely accepted global norm asserted from below, important governments and powerful corporations contest or reject this claim. This panel discussion will consider how local action that is based in communities of color and indigenous people in the United States may alter the US Government's position on the Human Right to Water. The panel portion will draw on global experiences (from India and Latin America) as well as domestic campaigns. Specifically, we will look at "The Color of Water Project" run by Massachusetts Global Action in Boston; the Indigenous-Labor-International links in Bolivia's ongoing water struggles (with Nancy Romer of the Professional Staff Congress-AFT Local 2334, NY); Global Campaigns out of India (with Amit Srivastava of

the India Resource Center); and reviews of the international legal struggle around HRW (panelist to be confirmed). Underlying all of these strategies are (1) campaigns that transcend mere anti-privatization to demand dynamic and responsive public sectors and (2) innovative coalitions involving communities, labor and solidarity movements.

The event will adopt a workshop format that (1) includes five 3-5 minute presentations (each with written outlines to be distributed); (2) develops a US-specific checklist on environmental justice communities and the HRW in a participatory manner; (3) brainstorms HRW objectives for the US (with all attendees invited to participate); (4) brainstorms on the opportunities for and challenges of coalition building in the US and globally.

In addition to organizations already listed, other invited participants in the workshop include the Indigenous Environmental Network; the Environmental Justice Coalition for Water; the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee; Poor Peoples Economic Human Rights Campaign; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Topic – The Social Forum Process

2. Networking Sessions for Movement Building Centers

<http://www.ussf2007.org/en/node/3716>

The Brecht Forum and Massachusetts Global Action are proposing two sessions, on networking for movement centers—that is institutions such as ours which serve as cross-movement centers for a variety of activities ranging from cultural events to political education, research and study circles, public discussion, debate and strategy sessions. We plan to circulate the proposal as widely as possible to other centers in the US, Canada and Mexico prior to the Social Forum to ensure broad participation as well as prior discussion of possible directions we could take.

First Session

- Sharing of experiences – An opportunity for us to learn from each other about how we see our role in movement building—the needs we address-- as well as the different ways that our groups doing similar work are carrying it out. Identification of frequently encountered problems and solutions we have found.
- Exploration of possible areas of collaboration in such areas as program, curriculum, outreach, technology, research & analysis, tours, etc.

Second Session

- Exploration of the possibilities for a possible ongoing network that would need to develop a statement of goals, objectives and means of functioning.
- Exploration of the “Popular University of Social Movements” proposal mooted by the leading WSF thinker, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, to “help make knowledge of alternative globalization as global as globalization itself.”

MGA is an organizer of the workshop. Partners: the Brecht Forum (New York City); the Center for Political Education (San Francisco); the Center for Global Justice (San Miguel de Allende, Mexico) and Rabble.ca (Toronto).

3. You Too Can Organize and Run a Regional Social Forum!

<http://www.ussf2007.org/en/node/2882>

Session Description: Video clips from the Western Mass Social Forum held on April 14 and 15, 2007, will be used to highlight positive outcomes and potential obstacles we encountered in the process of joining together to organize the WMSF. This session will help participants identify concrete planning and implementation tasks necessary for organizing and running a regional social forum. Participants will explore potential problem areas, as well as potential benefits. Small group discussions will provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions and discuss together how to get started and follow through with their own regional forum. The biggest challenge we faced in Western Mass was getting organizations working in communities of color and poor communities involved in the organizing process. Many, but not all, of these communities are in “survival” mode and don’t have time to plan, even though people saw the potential benefits of building increased unity and collaboration. We found that generally organizations are in “solo” mode and have difficulty finding time and resources for joint efforts for change. In this session we want to strategize with others to find alternative ways of organizing for a forum that involve the communities most directly affected by current economic and political systems. The session will be in English and we will have the capability of whispering or simultaneous translation into Spanish. There will be handouts in English and Spanish. We will share copies of the schedule and program of the Western Mass Social Forum.

As a co-sponsor, MGA will bring experiences from the Boston Social Forum to the workshop.

4. The Future of the Forum

<http://www.ussf2007.org/en/node/2587>

Description: What does it mean to bring a form of organizing civil society from the Global South to the heart of the Empire? What can activists in the United States contribute to the global social forum process? How can social forums be made politically more useful? This panel will reflect on these and other issues involved in the organization of social forums on local, regional, and global levels.

Moderator: Marc Becker Speakers: Thomas Ponniah, Marina Karides, Jackie Smith, Walda Katz-Fishman, Rose Brewer, Michael Hardt, Janet Conway

Sponsors: Sociologists without Borders, Network Institute for Global Democratization

MGA staffer Suren Moodliar will join the panel as a speaker.

Topic – The Workers Movement

5. The Right to Strike: Challenging the Taylor Law

<http://www.ussf2007.org/en/node/5016>

The Taylor Law was enacted to discipline a series of transit workers strikes in the late 1960s. Through the crises of the 1970s, it helped prevent workers from taking decisive action which may have changed their economic chances during times of de-industrialization, downsizing, and attacks on public sector jobs and housing. Today it scares workers away from striking. This panel is about how New York City workers can mount an effective challenge to one of the country's most backwards and draconian labor laws.

While some argue for its abolition, other point out the possibility for radical action if workers can be pushed to break the law en masse, raising civil rights as well as labor rights issues. What is the best way to challenge it? In the streets or in the courts? What kind of a labor strategy is necessary to defeat it? What does victory even mean--that we can strike without discipline or that the law is abolished?

Some argue that the Wagner Act, which granted folks the right to organize open unions in 1935, was the death knell for radical unionism. How do we deal with this hurdle to building a strong public sector unionism that can take direct action?

Panelists and participants will include members of the Professional Staff Congress-CUNY, the Transit Workers Union and contingent worker organizations.

6. Transnational Unity in the Struggle for Migrant Workers Rights

<http://www.ussf2007.org/en/node/3782>

This activity seeks to demonstrate the need to join forces in the world to confront the injustices of a condition created by contemporary capitalism: large masses of migrant workers desperately seeking work to survive. In that process they are abused, victimized, exploited and discriminated.

The U.S. has large masses of exploited undocumented workers, nearly 12 millions in all. Yet, the "immigrant rights" movement in the U.S. has not joined in with the rest of the world but it must. We

must move forward the agenda agreed upon at the World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya by the Migrant Workers Rights Assembly.

We must make ours the following principles agreed upon by the WSF-MWRA:

"Therefore, it is necessary to keep making the links between migration related questions and the larger struggle against neo-liberal policies that jeopardize everyone's liberty.

Together, we reaffirm our rejection of the idea that migration and migrants are a problem to be eradicated and that migrants are a source of insecurity, terrorism, or illegal trafficking.

We refuse both to criminalize migrants and to accept the idea that migratory movements are somehow dangerous to people in the receiving countries. Laws concerning migration should be based on human rights rather than on security and repressive considerations.

We call for a change of perspective in the debate on migration. We reaffirm that migrants participate in the transformation of societies and we reassert their positive and vital role. Migrants embody the international solidarity values we all defend. Migrants' rights are human rights."

Event is organized by the Boston May Day Coalition of which MGA is a member.