

BCA Dispatch

"The issue is not issues; the issue is the system"
—Ronnie Dugger

Newsletter of the **November-December**
Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy **2008**

For many whites, the fast-track journey to absolution via the ballot box—while bypassing the discomfort of reconciliation—is now complete.

---LarryInNoVA (a reader of BlackAgendaReport.com)

CHAPTER NEWS

The next meeting of BCA/NorthBridge will be on **Tuesday, December 9th at 7pm** at the **Alliance offices, 760 Main Street, Waltham MA**. It's just behind the fieldstone church, 2 blocks west of the Common, on the #70 bus line from Central Square, Cambridge. Big parking lot. We will discuss current events and deal with our active and potential projects. For agenda and project info, call Barbara Clancy at 781-894-1179.

Citizen Exit Polling

On Election Day, 4 November, **Sally Castleman** of Election Defense Alliance rallied our Alliance troops to conduct exit polling in the swing state of New Hampshire. In two selected wards in Manchester, BCA/NorthBridge members **Joanna Herlihy, Nancy Wrenn, Peter Smith, Michael Bleiweiss** and **Dave Lewit** joined others on two shifts in approaching every *(Continued on Page 8 >>)*

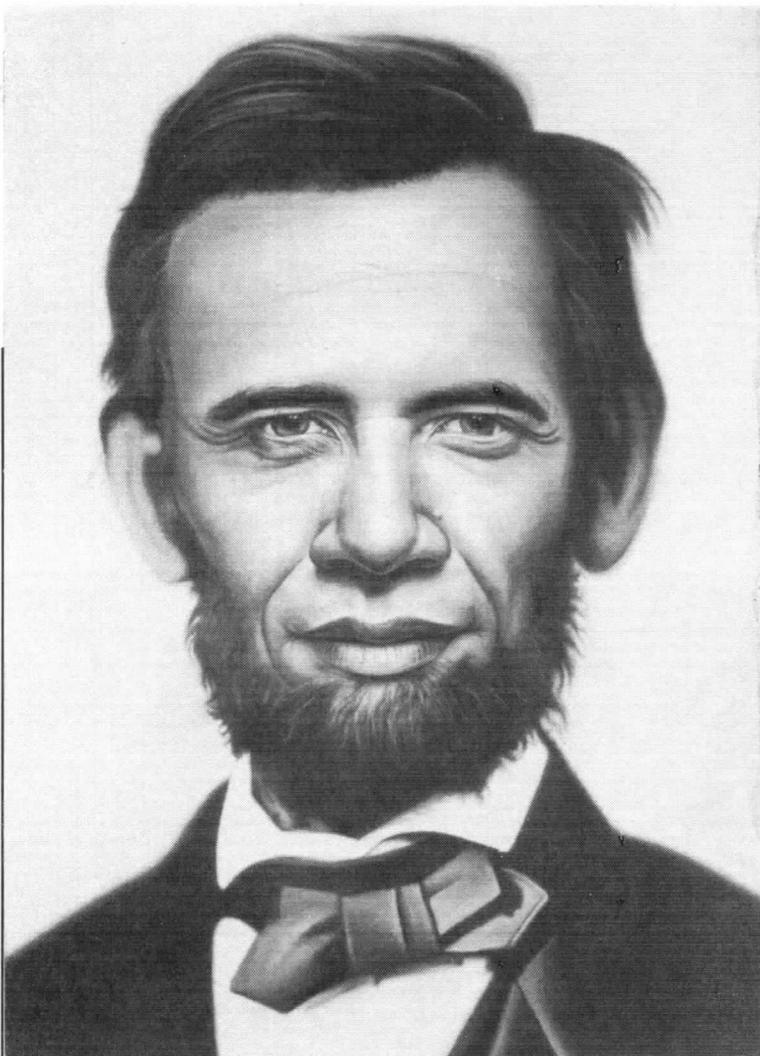
Corps Spike Democracy Initiative California County Caves to Legal Costs

Democracy Unlimited of Humboldt County, 10 November 2008

HUMBOLDT COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AND THE PACIFIC LEGAL FOUNDATION filed a joint settlement proposal in Federal Court today to label the county's ban on corporate campaign contributions "null and void". Known locally as Measure T, the Humboldt County ordinance to Protect Our Right to Fair Elections and Local Democracy was a groundbreaking county-wide law that banned non-local corporations from contributing money to local elections and challenged the legal doctrine of "corporate personhood"—the idea that corporations can legally claim constitutional rights such as the First Amendment (freedom of speech). By citizen's initiative in 2006, Measure T passed by 55%.

"We are deeply dismayed that our elected officials bowed so easily to the pressure from the corporate-backed Pacific Legal Foundation," said Kaitlin Sopoci-Belknap, the spokesperson for the Humboldt Coalition for Community Rights, the group that ran the Measure. "We have offered help and support to the Board of Supervisors to do the right thing every step of the way. Instead they chose to make this decision without soliciting input from the people of Humboldt County who were looking to them to defend our rights and respect our authority to determine what is best for our local elections."

Measure T was passed in June 2006 in reaction to repeated local campaigns with involvement from large corporations. The Measure received national attention *(Continued on Page 5 >>>)*



Lincoln-Obama, a "fusion painting" by Ron English

*When asked what one book, other than the Bible, he would take to the White House, president-elect Obama cited historian Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals* (2005). In great detail she discusses president Lincoln's choices for his cabinet and his management of three high-profile contenders for his presidential nomination: Sen. William Henry Seward, Sen/Gov. Salmon P Chase, and elder statesman Edward Bates. (The book is sold out at Boston's Borders, Barnes & Noble, and Trident.) Among others, Obama has chosen rival pro-war Sen. Hillary Clinton as his secretary of state and Republican Gov. Janet Napolitano as secretary of homeland security. Thus, will he bring together the nation, or the elite?*

Why Obama's Futurama Can Wait Schools, Hospitals Spell More Jobs, Verve

by Mike Davis, Tomdispatch.com. 19 November 2008

AMERICA'S "FUTURAMA" IS DEFUNCT. The famous walk-through diorama of a car-and-suburb world, imagineered by Norman Bel Geddes for General Motors at the 1939 New York World's Fair, has weathered into a dreary emblem of our national backwardness. While GM bleeds to death on a Detroit street corner, the steel-and-concrete Interstate landscape built in the 1950s and 1960s is rapidly decaying into this century's equivalent of Victorian rubble.

As we wait in potholed gridlock for the next highway bridge to collapse, the French, the Japanese, and now the Spanish blissfully speed by us on their sci-fi trains. Within the next year or two, Spain's high-speed rail network will become the world's largest,

with plans to cap construction in 2020 at an incredible 6,000 miles of fast track. Meanwhile China has launched its first 200 mile-per-hour prototype, and Saudi Arabia and Argentina are proceeding with the construction of their own state-of-the-art systems. Of the larger rich, industrial countries, only the United States has yet to build a single mile of what constitutes the new global standard of transportation.

From day one, Barack Obama campaigned to redress this infrastructure deficit through an ambitious program of public investment: "For our economy, our safety, and our workers, we have to rebuild America." Originally he proposed to finance this spending by ending the war in Iraq. Although his present commitments to a larger military and an expanded war in Afghanistan seem to foreclose any reconversion of the Pentagon budget, he continues to emphasize the urgency of an Apollo-style program to modernize highways, ports, rail transit, and power grids.

Public works, he also promises, can put the public back to work. His "Economic Rescue Plan for the Middle Class" vows to "create 5 million new, high-wage jobs by investing in the renewable sources of energy that will eliminate the oil we currently import from the Middle East in 10 years, and we'll create 2 million jobs by rebuilding our crumbling roads, schools, and bridges."

Of course, Bill Clinton entered the White House with a similarly ambitious plan to rebuild the derelict national infrastructure, but it was abandoned after Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin convinced the new president that deficit reduction was the true national priority. This time around, a much more powerful and desperate coalition of interests is aligned to *support* the Keynesian shock-and-awe of major public works.

The Lure of the Dozers

Since the Paulson bailout plan has become so much expensive spit in the wind, and with bond spreads now premised on the possibility of double-digit unemployment over the next 18 months, massive new federal spending has become a matter of sheer economic survival. As innumerable influentials—from *New York Times* columnist David Brooks to House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi—have argued, a crash program of infrastructure repair and construction, likely to include some investment in the new power grids required to bring more solar and wind energy online, is the "win-win" approach that will garner the quickest bipartisan support.

It has also been portrayed as the only lifeboat in the water for the ordinary steerage passengers in our sinking economy. The emergent Washington consensus seems to be that those five million green jobs can actually come later (after we save GM's shareholders), but that infrastructure spending—if resolutely pushed through the lame-duck Congress or adopted in Obama's first 100 days—can begin to pump money into the crucial construction and manufacturing sectors of the economy before the end of next winter.

Unlike Comrade Bush's "socialist" efforts to save Wall Street, a public-works strategy for national recovery has had broad ideological respectability from the days of Alexander Hamilton and Abraham Lincoln to those of Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. If Democrats can brag about the proud heritage of the Works Progress Administration and the Public Works Administration from the era of the Great Depression (ah, those magnificent post offices and parkways), there are still a few Republicans who remember the Golden Age of interstate highway construction that commenced in the 1950s with President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Indeed since the national shame of Hurricane Katrina, Americans have become outspokenly nostalgic about competent federal

governments and magnificent public achievements.

First, Save the Victims

If one accepts the reasonable principle of supporting the new president whenever he makes policy from the left or addresses basic social needs, shouldn't progressives be cheering the White House as it rolls out the dozers, Cats, and big cranes? Aren't high-speed mass transit and clean energy the kind of noble priorities that best reconcile big-bang stimulus with long-term public value?

The answer is: no, not at this stage of our national emergency. I'm not an infrastructure-crisis denialist, but first things first. We are now at a crash site, and our priority should be to save the victims, not change the tires or repair the fender, much less build a new car. In the triage situation that now confronts the president-elect, keeping local schools and hospitals open should be the first concern, rebuilding bridges and expanding ports would come next, and rescuing bank shareholders at the very end of the line.

Inexorably, the budgets of schools, cities, and states are sinking into insolvency on a scale comparable to the early 1930s. The public-sector fiscal crisis—a vicious chain reaction of falling property values, incomes, and sales—has been magnified by the unexpectedly large exposure of local governments and transit agencies to the Wall Street meltdown via complex capital lease-back arrangements. Meanwhile on the demand side, the need for public services explodes as even prudent burghers face foreclosure, not to speak of the loss of pensions and medical coverage. Although the public mega-deficits of California and New York may dominate headlines, the essence of the crisis—from the suburbs of Anchorage to the neighborhoods of West Philly—is its potential universality.

Certainly, in such a rich country, wind farms and schools should never become a Sophie's choice, but the criminal negligence of Congress over the past months should alert us to the likelihood that such a choice will be made—with disastrous results for both human services and economic recovery.

Renewing Schools and Hospitals

Congress naturally loves infrastructure because it rewards manufacturers, shippers, and contractors who give large campaign contributions, and because construction sites can be handsomely bill-boarded with the names of proud sponsors. Powerful business lobbies like the National Industrial Transportation League and the Coalition for America's Gateways and Trade Corridors [*SPP?* —Ed.] stand ready to grease the wheels of their political allies. In addition, if the past century of congressional pork-barrel methods is any precedent, infrastructural spending typically resists coherent national planning or larger cost-benefit analyses.

Yet saving (and expanding) core public employment is, hands-down, the best Keynesian stimulus around. *Federal investment in education and healthcare gets incomparably more bang for the buck*, if jobs are the principal criterion, than expenditures on transportation equipment or road repair [*italics ours throughout—Ed.*].

For example, \$50 million in federal aid during the Clinton administration allowed Michigan schools to hire nearly 1,300 new teachers. It is also the current operating budget of a Tennessee school district made up of eight elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools. On the other hand, \$50 million on the order book of a niche public transit manufacturer generates only 200 jobs (plus, of course, capital costs and profits). Road construction and bridge repair, also very capital intensive,

produce about the same modest, direct employment effect.

One of the most likely targets for a Congressional stimulus plan is light-rail construction. Street-car systems are enormously popular with local governments, redevelopment agencies, and middle-class commuters, but generally they operate less efficiently (per dollar per passenger) than bus systems, and at least 40% of the capital investment leaks overseas to German streetcar builders and Korean steel companies.

Personally, I would love to commute via a sleek Euro-style bullet train from my home in San Diego to my job in Riverside, 100 grueling freeway miles away, but I'll take gridlock if the cost of rationing federal expenditure is tolerating the closure of my kids' school or increasing the wait in the local emergency room from two to ten hours.

Obama, unlike his predecessor, has a bold vision, shared with his powerful supporters in high-tech industries, of catching up with the Spanish and Japanese, while redeeming America as the synonym for modernity. Lots of new infrastructure will, however, become so many bridges to nowhere (especially for our children) unless he and Congress first save human-needs budgets and public-sector jobs.

A good start for progressive agitation on Obama's left flank would be to demand that his health-care reform and aid-to-education proposals be brought front and center as preferential vehicles for immediate macro-economic stimulus. Democrats should not forget that the most brilliant and enduring accomplishment of the Kennedy-Johnson era was Head Start, not the Apollo Program.

If, after saving kindergartens and county hospitals, we someday hope to ride the fast train, then we need to rebuild the antiwar movement on broader foundations. The president-elect's original proposal for funding domestic social investment through downsizing the empire offers a brilliant starting point for basing economic growth on an *economic bill of rights* (as advocated by Franklin Roosevelt in 1944) instead of imperial over-reach and Pharaonic levels of military waste.

Mike Davis is the author of *In Praise of Barbarians: Essays Against Empire* (Haymarket Books, 2008) and *Buda's Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb* (Verso, 2007).

EDITORIAL

Dancing with Obama

THEY SAY THAT BLACK PEOPLE HEREABOUTS ARE NOTICEABLY STANDING TALL and moving about with more confidence.

But maybe that was only during the first week after Barack Obama's election. Within a week we began to see shades of Bill Clinton—maybe even Bush. The rush of excitement with the naming of a Colin Powell or Condoleezza Rice to cabinet posts gave way to disappointment or outrage at their actual performance—Powell's blindness to the details of military intelligence, and Condi's consistent puppet-like behavior. And oomagosh—Clarence Thomas still around?

But those people were second-level. Obama will be top dog, and not necessarily beholden to the corporations which helped finance his campaign. Because he's not seen to blunder (his campaign was superb), we had to wonder why he appointed Rahm Emanuel, that pro-Israel pit bull, as his VIP gate-keeper when Israel is the chief irritant of the Muslim world with which we must seek reconciliation. And then, it seems, he is entertaining one Clinton-era character after another—Hillary Clinton, Rubin, Summers, Holder... Will Obama turn his back on the multitude to whom he seemed to promise a new New Deal? Will his health

planning cave in like Clinton's? Will he retain Bush's imperial executive orders? Will his corporate affinity dictate?

Ah, but the Man Himself has a background rich in humanist experience. Character and intelligence may prevail. After all, he had been not just a community organizer, but also a constitutional law professor and introspective author. Intrigued, I consulted his biography in Wikipedia and found myself bumping into him in place after place—dancing, almost.

Born in Hawaii and then a childhood in Indonesia, Barack returned to Hawaii to attend middle and upper grades at Punahou School—at the time when I was a professor at the University of Hawaii and had enrolled my young children in Punahou's elementary nature study class while I was teaching... I sat in a hall at Harvard Law School, following the strolling-speech of Dennis Kucinich, perhaps in Obama's seat... Obama settled in Chicago—where I had spent a year in management consulting, living on the South Side not far from Obama's... While I was at the University of Michigan I experimented with problem-solving in biracial groups, unwittingly sharing concerns with Obama... While Obama was about to deliver his striking speech at the Democratic Party convention at Boston's sports arena, I was outside waving my pine-tree Bunker Hill flag of New England and taking pictures for the *Dispatch*...

Altogether, I identify with Obama's diversity of interests and social mixing, his concern with improving society, his intellectual pursuits, his ease in working with power, and his steadiness of temper. How could this man fall short in a world with so many potential paths?

So, though I had voted for Cynthia McKinney knowing that Obama would take Massachusetts, I was greatly relieved that McCain had lost and am optimistic that Obama will be honest and progressive regardless of all his corporate connections. Perhaps he will foster new forms of business organization as well as new (green, democratic) directions in production and fair paths of distribution. Perhaps. I fear a Lincoln Complex of national unity at any price (war), but trust that he would be happy with regional development and maybe even steps toward regional autonomy—call it "self-reliance", a good American ideal.

And if Hillary mires us in martial disaster, or if Janet Napolitano begins to act like Heinrich Himmler of the Gestapo, I expect Obama—unlike Bush—to fire them. After all, he fired his friend and mentor the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, didn't he?

Obama's Historic Victory

Cut the Military to Grow the Civil

by Howard Zinn, *L'Humanite* (Paris), 8 November 2008

THOSE OF US ON THE LEFT WHO HAVE CRITICIZED OBAMA, as I have, for his failure to take bold positions on the war and on the economy, must join the exultation of those Americans, black and white, who shouted and wept Tuesday night as they were informed that Barack Obama had won the presidential election. It is truly a historic moment, that a black man will lead our country. The enthusiasm of the young, black and white, the hopes of their elders, cannot simply be ignored.

There was a similar moment a century and a half ago, in the year 1860, when Abraham Lincoln was elected president. Lincoln had been criticized harshly by the abolitionists, the anti-slavery movement, for his failure to take a clear, bold stand against slavery, for acting as a shrewd politician rather than a moral force. But when he was elected, the abolitionist leader

Wendell Phillips, who had been an angry critic of Lincoln's cautiousness, recognized the possibility in his election.

Phillips wrote that for the first time in the nation's history "the slave has chosen a President of the United States." Lincoln, he said, was not an abolitionist, but he in some way "consents to represent an antislavery position." Like a pawn on the chessboard, Lincoln had the potential, if the American people acted vigorously, to be moved across the board, converted into a queen, and, as Phillips said, "sweep the board."

Obama, like Lincoln, tends to look first at his political fortunes instead of making his decisions on moral grounds. But, as the first African American in the White House, elected by an enthusiastic citizenry which expects a decisive move towards peace and social justice, he presents a possibility for important change.

Obama becomes president in a situation which cries out for such change. The nation has been engaged in two futile and immoral wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the American people have turned decisively against those wars. The economy is shaken by tremendous blows, and is in danger of collapsing, as families lose their homes and working people, including those in the middle class, lose their jobs. So the population is ready for change, indeed, desperate for change, and "change" was the word most used by Obama in his campaign.

What kind of change is needed? First, to announce the withdrawal of our troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, and to renounce the Bush doctrine of preventive war as well as the Carter doctrine of military action to control Mideast oil. He needs to radically change the direction of U.S. foreign policy, declare that the U.S. is a peace-loving country which will not intervene militarily in other parts of the world, and start dismantling the military bases we have in over a hundred countries. Also he must begin meeting with Medvedev, the Russian leader, to reach agreement on the dismantling of the nuclear arsenals, in keeping with the Nuclear Anti-Proliferation Treaty.

This turn-around from militarism will free hundreds of billions of dollars. A tax program which will sharply increase taxes on the richest 1% of the nation, and will tax their wealth as well as their income, will yield more hundreds of billions of dollars.

With all that saved money, the government will be able to give free health care to everyone, put millions of people to work which the so-called free market has not been able to do. In short, emulate the New Deal program, in which millions were given jobs by the government. This is just an outline of a program which could transform the United States and make it a good neighbor to the world

Howard Zinn grew up in Brooklyn, served as a bombardier in World War II, and has been actively engaged in civil rights and antiwar movements. He is author of many books, including A Power Governments Cannot Suppress

Our Computer—Bad News and Good News

After about 7 years (thanks, Dan Proctor!) and shaky recovery from a virus attack, our computer froze irrevocably. This delayed production of the November Dispatch. Now we have a new computer, but there are more delays as files are transferred, sorted, and new WordPerfect software tried. So we apologize, and hope you will gracefully accept this combined November-December issue. We expect to resume monthly publication in January.

Nonviolence Trend

It's Working in Majority of Cases

by Amitabh Pal, The Progressive, 31 October 2008

NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE IS NOT ONLY THE MORALLY SUPERIOR CHOICE. It is also twice as effective as the violent variety.

That's the startling and reassuring discovery by Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, who analyzed an astonishing 323 resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006.

"Our findings show that major nonviolent campaigns have achieved success 53 percent of the time, compared with 26 percent for violent resistance campaigns," the authors note in the *Journal International Security*. (The study is available as a PDF file at <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org>)

The result is not that surprising, once you listen to the researchers' reasoning.

"First, a campaign's commitment to nonviolent methods enhances its domestic and international legitimacy and encourages more broad-based participation in the resistance, which translates into increased pressure being brought to bear on the target," they state. "Second, whereas governments easily justify violent counterattacks against armed insurgents, regime violence against nonviolent movements is more likely to backfire against the regime."

In an interesting aside that has relevance for our times, the authors also write that, "Our study does not explicitly compare terrorism to nonviolent resistance, but our argument sheds light on why terrorism has been so unsuccessful."

To their credit, the authors don't gloss over nonviolent campaigns that haven't been successes. They give a clear-eyed assessment of the failure so far of the nonviolent movement in Burma, one of the three detailed case studies in the piece, along with East Timor and the Philippines.

In some sense, the authors have subjected to statistical analysis the notions of Gene Sharp, an influential Boston-based proponent of nonviolent change, someone they cite frequently in the footnotes. In his work, Sharp stresses the practical utility of nonviolence, de-emphasizing the moral aspects of it. He even asserts that for Gandhi, nonviolence was more of a pragmatic tool than a matter of principle, painting a picture that's at variance with much of Gandhian scholarship. In an interview with me in 2006, Sharp declared that he derives his precepts from Gandhi himself.

Gandhi's use of nonviolence "was pure pragmatism," Sharp told me. "At the end of his life, he defends himself. He was accused of holding on to nonviolent means because of his religious belief. He says no. He says, I presented this as a political means of action, and that's what I'm saying today. And it's a misrepresentation to say that I presented this as a purely religious approach. He was very upset about that."

This study is manna for those of us who believe in nonviolent resistance as a method of social change. We don't have to justify it on moral grounds any more. The reason is even simpler now: Nonviolence is much more successful.

One of the authors of the study, Maria Stephan, is at the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. The group's founders wrote a related book a few years ago, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*. Erica Chenoweth is at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

Amitabh Pal is managing editor of The Progressive.

Voters Choose Populist Methods Wins for IRV, Fair Redistricting, Fair Primaries

by Rob Richie, CommonDreams.org, 6 November 2008

2008 WAS HISTORIC in terms of the election of the first African American to be president and the largest number of voters at the polls in our history. But in the modern era, there is no excuse for privately-owned voting machines that breed mistrust, confusing ballot designs, polling places with long lines, voter registration laws that leave nearly a third of Americans off the rolls, an Electoral College system that undercuts equality and voting methods that suppress voter choice and stifle fair representation.

A round of electoral reform victories in key ballot measures suggest that Americans have had enough of antiquated electoral laws. Landslide majorities voted for instant runoff voting in Memphis, Tennessee (70%) and Telluride, Colorado (67%), for early voting in Maryland (71%) and for 17-year-old primary voting in Connecticut (64%), while proportional representation for city council elections in Cincinnati, Ohio, won 46.5% despite well-financed opposition that poured in close to \$100,000 in the last 10 days with a smear campaign of distortions.

Here are a few more details on this year's key ballot measures on electoral reform:

- Accommodating voter choice in a single trip to the polls in Memphis and Telluride — **Instant runoff voting** (also called ranked choice voting) has had a terrific run at the ballot box, securing wins in recent years across the nation. The second largest city in the southeastern United States, Memphis voted to adopt instant runoff voting for city election by an overwhelming 70% to 30% margin. Telluride (CO) adopted it for mayor, while Pierce County (WA) had a terrific first election with instant runoff voting in hotly contested races for county executive and other offices.
- **17-year-old primary voting** in Connecticut wins big -- Voters gave a landslide win of 64% for a state constitutional amendment to enable 17-year-olds who are pre-registered to vote in primaries connected to a general election in which they will be 18 and eligible to vote. Parties in most states don't need to wait for state action—they are empowered to enact it through a change in party rules, ideally twinned with voter registration policies making it possible for 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote.
- Landslide win for **early voting** in Maryland — Maryland voters having to wait in line yesterday must have been all the more ready to support state constitutional amendment one to establish early voting and relaxed absentee voting. It is winning 71% to 29%.
- **Redistricting reform** in California narrowly ahead --- This race has not been called, but Proposition 11 to establish an independent commission to conduct state legislative redistricting is ahead 50.5% to 49.5% and likely to win. Although not designed to give voters the chance to define their representation as would be true with proportional representation, it is high time to keep legislators from picking their voters before their voters pick them.
- "Top two" primary in Oregon trounced --- Ballot Measure 65 in Oregon would have replaced the current traditional primary election system with a system in which the parties could select nominees privately and voters in the primary then would narrow the field to the top two, regardless of party, to go onto the general election. Under consideration in other states like California, the

measure has been swamped by a two-to-one margin. Backers may turn to Pierce County's experience with instant runoff voting as a more popular way to **give voters real choices** in high turnout elections.

- **Initiative rights** protected in Arizona --- State voters by a two-to-one margin handily rejected Proposition 105, which would have made it almost impossible to pass initiatives by establishing that measures would need a majority of all registered voters regardless of voter turnout.

Of course we don't have to win change through ballot measures. In this era of heightened understanding of the power of electoral rules, state legislators and Members of Congress should adopt the **National Popular Vote plan** for president, universal voter registration, public ownership of any voting equipment, instant runoff voting, proportional representation and more. They can act knowing that voters are ready for change.

Rob Richie is the executive director of FairVote, a nonpartisan, nonprofit election reform and voting rights organization in Takoma Park MD.

CORPS SPIKE DEMOCRACY (Continued from Page 1)

when Humboldt County became the largest jurisdiction to directly challenge "corporate personhood", and joined with dozens of communities across the country that have rejected the idea that a corporation can claim rights to overturn local laws that restrict their behavior.

"While this is a sad day for democracy, the fight is far from over. Past social movements like the civil rights struggle, the abolitionists, women's suffragists and the trade unionists have shown us that when people don't back down, justice ultimately prevails," said Sopoci-Belknap. "All movements have their wins and losses, and the movement for local democracy and citizen sovereignty over large corporations will prevail. Humboldt County will play a role regardless of whether the current Board of Supervisors have the integrity to stand with us."

Pacific Legal Foundation, the organization that initiated the lawsuit against Humboldt County, is a Sacramento-based law firm backed by the types of corporations Measure T sought to restrict—companies like ExxonMobil and Philip Morris. In response to the lawsuit, many candidates in the recent local election races took a pledge to follow Measure T, regardless of the outcome. Many candidates declined contributions from companies that attempted to make political contributions to their campaigns and also pledged to publicly oppose the doctrine of "corporate personhood" and to uphold the rights of citizens over those of corporations during their time in office. The majority of candidates taking the pledge were elected last Tuesday.

The lawsuit settlement may be found at <http://www.VoteLocalControl.org/MeasureT-SettleAgmt.pdf>, the website of the Humboldt Coalition for Community Rights.

How Humboldt Works: BCA Talks with Democracy Unlimited

The five county Supervisors—libertarians of middle or working class—caved in to the well-funded corporate front group only because their attorney and court costs were draining county funds they felt were needed for basic public services, even though 4 of the 5 favored Measure T. The corporate front humiliated the County not only by forcing them to nullify the law—banning out-of-county political contributions and defying "corporate personhood" privileges of free speech (political PR), secrecy, due process (orbital litigation)—but required that the County fork over

\$44,000 for the corporation's attorney fees!

The case cannot be appealed because it was settled, not judged. Then again, it cannot serve as a legal precedent either.

Humboldt County (pop. 160k) in coastal northern California was a center for "hippies" in the '60s, whose culture still echos in the college town of Arcata (pop. 20k) but not in Eureka (pop. 31k) or the lumber and fishing towns and rural homes of the rest (109k) of the county. Still, Measure T won 55% countywide.

David Cobb of Democracy Unlimited of Humboldt County says that they plan to soldier on, educating and engaging the majority and training democracy-educated candidates to replace the present board of Supervisors. "The legal system is not designed to promote democracy... We're living the revolution" by living cooperatively, conceiving a remade society, teaching in interactive workshops, advising town governments—about investing, ordinances, purchasing, environmental and labor laws, cooperative mini-restaurants, sister cities—having 30-75 people at monthly pancake breakfasts, asking candidates to state their attitudes about "corporate personhood", going door-to door talking with folks—inspired by the Highlander Center which trained the likes of Rosa Parks, and by the social pedagogy of Brazil's Paulo Freire. In time, alternative institutions gel.

Altogether Cobb characterizes this activity as "culture-shifting" to noncompetitive, locally cooperative ways. You know it's working when local police will not cooperate with Homeland Security's bought-and-paid-for "sneak & peek" surveillance policies—and in Eureka a cop can be fined \$10 for wrong enforcement.

In New England the Alliance for Democracy is also fostering local, rights-based, town ordinances, challenging giant corporations by banning water export (from the town), writing out "corporate personhood" and writing in the rights of Nature into town charters—all through local Democracy Schools (workshops) and citizen organizing. The style is a bit more formal than that of Humboldt, but it works in the New England culture. ■

Tight School Regimen Is Stupefying Kids: Free Play to Become Creative Citizens

by David Crary, *Associated Press*, 19 Nov 2008

IN ONE CLASSROOM, A GROUP OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS squatted on the floor, pretending to be cave-dwelling hunter-gatherers. Next door, another group ended a raucous musical game by placing their tambourines and drums atop their heads.

Silly business, to be sure, but part of an agenda of utmost seriousness: To spread the word that America's children need more time for freewheeling play at home and in their schools.

"We're all sad, and we're a little worried. ... We're sad about something missing in childhood," psychologist and author Michael Thompson told 900 early childhood educators from 22 states packed into an auditorium last week.

"We have to fight back," he declared. "We're going to fight for play."

After his keynote speech at New York's 92nd Street Y, the teachers dispersed into dozens of workshops, some lighthearted, some scholarly—but all supporting the case that creative, spontaneous play is both vital and endangered.

It's not a brand-new cause—two years ago it was endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. But social changes and new demands on kids' spare time confront free-play advocates with an ever-moving target.

Among the speakers at last week's Wonderplay conference Y

was Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, a Temple University psychologist who contends that lack of play in early childhood education "could be the next global warming."

Without ample opportunity for forms of play that foster innovation and creative thinking, she argues, America's children will be at a disadvantage in the global economy.

"Play equals learning," she said. "For too long we have divorced the two."

Some of the factors behind diminished play time have been evolving for decades, others are more recent. Added together, they have resulted in eight to 12 fewer hours of free play time per week for the average American child since the 1980s, experts say.

Among the key factors, according to Thompson:

— Parents' reluctance to let their kids play outside on their own, for fear of abduction or injury, and the companion trend of scheduling lessons, supervised sports and other structured activities that consume a large chunk of a child's non-school hours.

- More hours per week spent by kids watching TV, playing video games, using the Internet, communicating on cell phones.

- Shortening or eliminating recess at many schools—a trend so pronounced that the National PTA has launched a "Rescuing Recess" campaign.

- More emphasis on formal learning in preschool, more homework for elementary school students and more pressure from parents on young children to quickly acquire academic skills.

"Parents are more self-conscious and competitive than in the past," Thompson said. "They're pushing their kids to excel. ... Free play loses out."

The consequences are potentially dire, according to Thompson. He contends that diminished time to play freely with other children is producing a generation of socially inept young people and is a factor behind high rates of youth obesity, anxiety, attention-deficit disorder and depression.

Many families turn to organized sports as a principal non-school activity, but Thompson noted that this option doesn't necessary breed creativity and can lead to burnout for good young athletes and frustration for the less skilled.

Vivian Paley, a former kindergarten teacher at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools and now an author and consultant, argues that the most vital form of play for young children involves fantasy and role-playing with their peers.

"They're inventing abstract thinking, before the world tells them what to think," Paley said in her speech to the conference. "It gets them thinking, 'I am intended to have my own ideas.'"

She worried that preschools, in the drive to prepare students for the academic challenges ahead, are reducing the opportunity for group fantasy play - and thus reducing children's chances to learn on their own about fairness, kindness and other social interactions.

"The theater of the young receives the least attention from those planning the curriculum of our nation's schools," Paley said. "This very activity is being dismantled in our schools to make room for early phonics. ... Preschoolers are being asked to practice being first graders."

Fretta Reitzes, director of the 92 Street Y's youth and family center, which serves more than 6,000 children, says many of the parents she sees are struggling to find the right balance for their kids' schedules, asking "How much is too much?"

Preschool teachers need to lead by example, Reitzes said. "Bringing play back into the lives of children, it's not just OK," she said. "It's really good for them." ■

Commercial TV & Radio Rot

Obama Set for Better Internet, Public Media

by Josh Silver, *Huffington Post*, 13 November 2008

ASK JUST ABOUT ANY PUBLIC INTEREST ADVOCATE concerned about the dismal state of media and journalism, and they will tell you that Obama's media policy platform is excellent: the beginning of what could be the most public interest friendly administration in presidential history. Part of this optimism stems from Obama's understanding that Internet and technology are the cornerstone of a 21st century economy and society. Another part comes from the competence and integrity of the media and telecom advisers working on his transition team. And another comes from his direct experience.

Obama-the-candidate commented several times that voters' false views of him—that he's a Muslim, a socialist and unpatriotic—were fed and spread by Fox News and their cohorts like Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham in the far-right media. Obama understands that they are the special sauce in Karl Rove's toxic recipe to discredit progressive policies and politicians, and divide Americans with wedge issues.

And Obama understands that pushing back against guys like Limbaugh—who this week blamed the president-elect for the financial crisis, calling it "Obama's recession"—requires a bold policy agenda that uses the Internet to pry media distribution monopolies away from the largest media companies. Though often underreported, Obama spoke frequently about his commitment to blocking further media consolidation, fostering more independent and diverse media, ensuring universal high-speed Internet access, and "taking a back seat to no one" in passing "Net Neutrality" laws to prevent Internet providers like Comcast and AT&T from creating fast and slow lanes on the Internet. (Click link in source for a look at Obama's important media reform pledges during his campaign).

The *Washington Post* ombudsman and others claim that the media was too kind to Obama and hard on John McCain. This superficial analysis is both wrong and misleading. Wrong because you had a candidate that was forcefully embracing the policies of George W. Bush while the nation spiraled into one of its darkest moments in its history. The idea that the press should not exert sharp criticism of such a candidate reflects the kind of tepid pandering that has become the hallmark of mainstream corporate media.

And misleading because the real problem is not the media favoring one candidate over another, but rather its utter failure to practice critical journalism. Turn on your television or radio, and it's 24/7 horse-race political coverage, partisan shouting matches, and salacious crap. There is no effort to tell voters the difference between the candidates' rhetoric and reality, how their proclamations match their voting records, and what their policy proposals would actually do. While there were a few notable moments when news outlets actually did this during the campaign, they were few and far between.

Olbermann and Maddow's increased popularity is moving the range of debate on cable from center-right to left-right, but radio is still overwhelmingly right-wing, and the changes at MSNBC fall far short of a comprehensive, long-term solution to the crisis of journalism. Newsroom layoffs mount across television, radio and newspapers, and omission has become the greatest threat. There is virtually no in-depth coverage and analysis on television of Iraq and Afghanistan, poverty, the environment and the other critical

issues facing working Americans. And despite the explosion of the Internet, 45% of American homes still have no high speed Internet, while some 65% of Americans still cite TV as their primary news source.

Charges of liberal bias continue to strike such fear in the hearts of corporate news editors and producers, that they continue obsessive contortions to present both sides of every debate—not from a factual perspective, but from a partisan one. Even if one side of an argument is clearly true, today's Wolf Blitzer, Charlie Gibson or Brian Williams—and even NPR and PBS—dare not say it (such as the economic bailout being a corrupt boondoggle for banking fat-cats) and suffer the wrath of the right wing noise machine, and pressure from their corporate bosses. In today's media environment, the truth becomes irrelevant.

Take a walk through rural Ohio as I did this Election Day, and working-class voters are watching Fox, reading empty newspapers running on a bare-bones staff, and listening to radio's right-wing hate-fest. In today's media environment, we must face the fact that if not for the financial crisis and a disastrous GOP vice-presidential pick, this election might well have been McCain's.

So the incoming president is excellent on media policy, and his election allows media reform advocates to move from defense to offense. However, as Obama inherits a severe economic crisis, two wars, and myriad other problems, it will be too easy for media issues to get pushed down the to-do list. And the well-financed lobbyists from the phone, cable and broadcasting companies who supported Obama's candidacy are expecting a return on their investment. As well they should: if you look back at the history of Democratic presidents and media policy, there have been many disappointments, and cause for us to be as cautious as we are optimistic.

Here's a quick list of the top policy reforms to watch in 2009 for anyone who shares my disgust with news coverage, sky-high cable and phone bills, and the other maladies brought by a media system dominated by the likes of Comcast, Disney, AT&T, General Electric, Verizon, News Corporation and Time Warner:

Getting super-fast, open/neutral, affordable Internet to every home and business in America, urban and rural, rich and poor—Internet that will allow every website to be a television or radio network... a complete game changer.

Reversing consolidation of media ownership through tougher broadcast license requirements and incentives for more independent, diverse and local radio, television and print outlets. Dramatically increasing funding for public media—for PBS and NPR, as well as community radio and television, and other non-commercial outlets. This includes policies that better protect public media from undue political pressures.

Now that the [electoral] champagne has been put away, it's time to realize that while disastrous members of Bush & Co. are heading towards the exits, the disastrous members of mainstream media remain firmly in place. Ignore the problem at your—and the nation's—peril.

Josh Silver is executive director of Free Press.



LETTERS

I just read that China is responding to the global economic slow-down by investing heavily in infrastructure. It is my impression that the banks in China, or at least many of them, are genuinely government owned. Accordingly, they can lend almost any amount of money that the economy can absorb, and right now that is a lot. No debt accumulates to the government and no interest is paid. Surely this is a vastly preferable system.

---[Prof.] John B Cobb, Jr., Claremont CA

CHAPTER NEWS (Continued from Page 1)

voter emerging from the polling place, with a clipboard asking how they voted, then independently noting gender, age, and race. Our purpose was to "double check" the accuracy of the tallies for each candidate. Most voters took a minute to fill in the blanks, but some dashed off to work or declined for unspecified reasons. Our methods were the same as professional exit polling, which have proven to be very accurate, sometimes revealing serious discrepancies in districts known to have problematic voting machines. After polls closed several of us stayed past midnight sorting and counting questionnaires. Analysis of results by **Jonathan Simon** and Sally will soon be completed and reported. Help Sally (see *Letters* below), and stay tuned for their report and public discussion.

Veterans Day March for Peace

Paul Brailsford, Virginia Pratt, Eva Moseley, Dave Lewit, and many other Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom marched through downtown Boston on 11 November carrying large black-and-white VFP flags while chanting anti-war rhymes in military cadence. When we got to the City Hall plaza there was no sign of the seemingly pro-war American Legion, which for years had controlled speeches there on Veterans Day, forcibly silencing peace advocates. Perhaps they realized that war fever was finished, and that they would only antagonize the many anti-war spectators lining the streets.

That evening at Clarendon Hill Presbyterian Church in Somerville, **Victor Wallis** led off discussion of the meaning of the Election—What Next? for the Somerville-Medford United for Justice and Peace group. **Toby** and **Wes Frost** showed up, as well as Dave Lewit. Emphasis was on local work to hold Obama's feet to the fire, protect immigrants, and replace corrupt local government with democratic practices. Planned extension of the Green Line into Somerville brought out conflicting views as to whether it would help or damage community.

North American Secessionist Convention

Fifty-five delegates and observers from more than a dozen locations in North America turned out in Manchester NH on 15 November to share views on regional movements for secession from the United States and Canada. Secession makes sense as an alternative to unmanageable and undemocratic governance in these large countries. **Cynthia Ritsher** and Dave Lewit heard reports from formerly independent areas like Vermont, Hawaii, and Texas, as well as Alaska, US South, Quebec, Cascadia (Pacific Northwest), Novocadia (Northern New England and Canadian Maritimes), New Hampshire, Long Island, and Maine. The event, the third annual convention, was organized by **Kirkpatrick Sale**, author of bioregionalism, who has moved—for fall, winter, and spring—to South Carolina, returning to Cold Spring NY for the summer.

City Councilor Chuck Turner in Court 10 December

Early Friday morning, 21 November, FBI agents arrested Chuck

Turner in his office, charging him with taking a \$1000 bribe from someone seeking a commercial liquor license. The Boston Globe front-paged the story, showing a fuzzy photo. Anyone who knows Chuck, cannot believe this. Since first elected in 1999 Chuck Turner is the most outspoken councilor for social justice and friend of the Alliance for Democracy, helping the City Council to endorse our Globalization Impact Bill, leading the fight against BU's proposed supertoxic Biolab, fostering a student movement for new civics in Boston high schools, serving on our panel for Popular Governance in New England held in Burlington VT (*DVD's now available; call Barbara Clancy at 781-894-1179*).

This has got to be a scam. No seasoned elected official will risk his or her career for \$1000. The photo allegedly showing his taking folded money is truncated and fuzzy. The accuser is suspiciously anonymous. Chuck is a system thinker, not a tinkerer. This sort of thing—commercial favors—is well outside Chuck's dedicated concern with social and environmental justice.

ACTION ALERTS

Any day soon, broadly mid-day, Waltham. Help wanted for entering exit poll data, from AfD work in Manchester NH. At Alliance office, 760 Main St. (directions, Chapter News, page 1). Ask Barbara Clancy at 781-894-1179; bclancy122@earthlink.net

Wed. 10 Dec. [a.m.?], Boston. Chuck Turner Hearing concerning allegations of bribe-taking. Moakley Federal Court House, South Boston waterfront, first stop on the Silver Line from South Station. By car: dial 617-748-9152 for directions and docket. For more info: call Chuck's office: 617-635-3510 or 617-427-8100.

Thu. 11 Dec., 7pm, Ashland MA. Film: "Truth Be Told" about **Trans-Texas Corridor** and opposition by Texans to construction of this huge highway/rail construction project, a part of the infrastructure proposed by the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP). Film website: www.truthbetolled.com. Town library, 66 Front St. Info: call David or Cynthia Whitty: 508-881-6297.

JOIN THE BCA

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN BOSTON TO LOVE BCA
Please help us as we fight to make a better future for ourselves and our children — Join the Boston/Cambridge Alliance for Democracy. (Cut out or copy this form and send it to Dave Lewit, 271 Dartmouth St. #2h, Boston, MA 02116.)

BOSTON-CAMBRIDGE ALLIANCE for DEMOCRACY PLEDGE

___ \$33/Year - "Count me in!"

___ \$66/Year - "Contributor" (We need to average this amount.)

___ \$111/Year - "Sustainer" (Helping us thrive.)

___ \$222/Year - "Community Steward"

___ \$500/Year - "Realize the vision"

___ What's fair for YOU? _\$_____

Name : _____ Date: _____

Street No./Box/Apt: _____

Town and Zip: _____

Phone: Day _____ Night: _____

E-mail (for occasional contact): _____

COLOPHON

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