

## Reflections on the United States Social Forums, 2015

Temple University's Student Center hummed with activity from June 25-28 with registration, tabling and meet-ups associated with the Philadelphia US Social Forum (USSF) 2015. The Philly Forum, organized by members of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign and Disabled in Action, was driven by the "understanding that people's movements are what create social change... and a commitment to reaching far and near to lift up all community voices so that they can be heard and know they are not alone." The gathering drew approximately 2000 people.

And on the West Coast, approximately 1800 people gathered at the Washington United Youth Center in San Jose, Ca. The anchor groups were Move To Amend, Hip Hop Congress, San Jose Peace & Justice Center, Human Agenda, Right To Survive, and Community to Community.

The third USSF differed from previous social forums in Atlanta and Detroit. It wasn't the only Forum taking place at that time – in addition to the simultaneous event occurring in San Jose, CA there were also satellite events taking place in Jackson, MS and Tijuana, Mexico. Another change was the **greater emphasis on grassroots movement building**

**and the need to change not simply certain policies and laws but political and economic systems at the root of worsening human injustices and environmental calamities.** More urgent was the need for people's movements to counter the rapidly growing failures of political and economic power elites. Those who must assume greater leadership roles in independent but coordinated movements are those who've been most harmed by policies favoring the super wealthy, corporate entities and the national security state.

POCLADers Greg Coleridge and Virginia Rasmussen (in Philly) and David Cobb (in San Jose) joined folks from Move to Amend, the American Friends Service Committee and other groups to frame a number of programs related to defining democracy, building community through anti-oppression organizing, and denying constitutional rights to corporate entities. **A People's Movement Assembly (PMA) on "The People vs. the Corporations: Whose Constitution Is It?" assumed a valuable role by posing a collective challenge to the expanding economic, political, ecological and legal crises.** Together participants came to realize the path to sane, humane,

democratic and sustainable change must include, yet go beyond, a constitutional amendment to end corporate personhood and money as speech.

Essential in working for any change is imagining something better and laying out the required steps to make that vision real. **We left this engaging session convinced that "We the People" are capable, indeed, of envisioning new systems for living our lives together. But until we claim the legal authority to govern ourselves so that we can put those visions in place, they will remain just that, visions.**

Participating in the USSF reminded Greg of Gandhi's statement, "The means are the ends in the making." We can only control how we act, the steps we take in the path we are on. Precisely where it ends is impossible to determine. Don't let that deter you. Do what you can when you can. Attend your needs when required but commit a part of your life to working in some way for fundamental change. It's needed now more than ever.

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**By What Authority** (ISSN: 524-1106) is published by the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy. The title is English for *quo warranto*, a legal phrase that questions illegitimate exercise of privilege and power. We the people and our federal and state officials have long been giving giant business corporations illegitimate authority. Today, a minority directing giant corporations and backed by police, courts, and the military, define our culture, govern our nation and plunder the earth. **By What Authority** reflects an unabashed assertion of the right of the sovereign people to govern themselves.

POCLAD is a group of 10 people instigating democratic conversations and actions that contest the authority of corporations to govern. Our analysis evolves through historical and legal research, writing, public speaking and working with organizations to develop new strategies that assert people's rights over property interests.

**BWA** is a tool for democracy proponents to rethink and reframe their work. To that end we encourage readers to engage us with comments, questions and suggestions.

POCLAD  
P.O. Box 246  
South Yarmouth, MA 02664-0246  
508-398-1145; 508-398-1552 (fax)  
[people@poclad.org](mailto:people@poclad.org); [www.poclad.org](http://www.poclad.org)

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Peace Association

David Cobb, CA  
Karen Coulter, OR  
Greg Coleridge, OH  
Mike Ferner, OH  
Dave Henson, CA  
Lewis Pitts, NC  
Jim Price, AL  
Virginia Rasmussen, NY  
Kaitlin Sopoci-Belknap, CA  
Mary Zepernick, MA

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