

Homecare Workers Win Big

The Fresno County Board of Supervisors affirmed their commitment to provide quality homecare to Fresno residents by voting to approve a groundbreaking new contract that significantly improves wages and benefits for local homecare workers. Community leaders, clergy, and other residents praised the Supervisors as they ratified a three year contract that will provide wage increases of \$2.10 per hour and health benefit improvements of \$0.20 per hour to 8,500 homecare workers represented by SEIU United Healthcare Workers-West.

"This is something we've been working on for 15 years. These improvements in wages and benefits will make a major change in the quality of life for those of us who receive assistance, but also for those who provide for us on a daily basis," said John Wilkins, an IHSS con-

sumer who receives homecare services.

Before today's vote, Fresno County homecare workers earned only \$8.15 an hour. After today's vote, homecare workers will see their wages rise to \$10.25 by October 1, 2008 and will receive dental coverage in addition to their current medical benefits, effective October 1, 2006. The contract expires on October 1, 2009.

"In order to make housing and healthcare more accessible, you've got to close the gap between wages and the cost of living. Fresno County and its homecare workers are closing that gap with this agreement," commented Pastor Paul Werfelman of Hope Lutheran Church.

The agreement includes approximately \$61 million dollars in state and federal matching funds over the next three years to pay for over 80% of the improved wages and benefits. It is estimated that the wage increase will result in \$40 million dollars of new spending activity in Fresno County. The new spending will also generate new tax revenues – possibly as much as several hundred thousand dollars a year.

"One of the reasons I'm supporting this increase is because of the millions of new dollars in matching funds that will be infused into the local economy. And these dollars will go a long way towards helping disabled and elderly county residents find consistent quality care," said Supervisor Susan Anderson.

"Our new contract with IHSS Homecare workers is a win for the whole community. Homecare clients, who are some of Fresno's most vulnerable residents, will get the consistent support from seasoned caregivers. And Fresno's economy will benefit from the spending activity and additional tax revenue created by our better paid homecare workers," said Supervisor Bob Waterston.

8,500 homecare workers are employed by Fresno In-Home Support Services, an agency governed by the County Board of Supervisors that makes it possible for Fresno seniors and people with disabilities to live with dignity in their own homes, rather than in nursing homes. Five times cheaper than institutional care, IHSS homecare provides assistance with house cleaning, meal preparation, laundry, and grocery shopping, bathing, groom, and transportation to medical appointments.

"Homecare isn't just my job, it's my commitment to care for the community I love: Fresno. With our new contract, I can afford to stay in my job and keep providing quality care for my client so she can remain living with dignity in her own home," said IHSS homecare worker Judy Keifer.

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SEIU United Healthcare Workers-West, with more than 140,000 members, is the largest and most powerful healthcare union in the Western U.S. We represent every type of healthcare worker, including nursing, professional, technical and service classifications. Our mission is to achieve high quality healthcare for all.



Homecare workers have been struggling for a Living Wage for years. The above march was held in October of 2003. Photo by Mike Rhodes

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Whither Darfur?

Aaron Tesfaye

Sudan is a nation confronted by three intractable political challenges, where peace has been elusive and political solutions to state-society conflicts chimerical. In the south of the country, the people under the leadership of the Sudan Peoples' Liberation



Army (SPLA) had fought the central government for some twenty years and in the process up to a million people had lost their lives. In the east, there is a simmering rebellion fueled by politics and disgruntled army elements that live scattered among the Beja in and around Kasala. In the west, the region of Darfur has become known as a land of an all-out scorched-earth war, rape, plunder, and refugees.

The daily suffering of the people of Darfur has left Africans as well as the world scrambling for a "solution" to this intractable problem. Since Darfur borders Chad and the Central African Republic, the crisis has led Darfurians to become cross-border refugees. They have fled for survival, attempting to escape the marauding *Janjaweed* (Arab militias) and the central government's aerial bombardments. They live in a no man's land in tent cities in the middle of the Sahara desert.

In antiquity, Sudan was a province of Meroe. It came to be known as *Beled al Sud* (land of the black people) in AD 700 when Islam was introduced into the region. The citizens of ancient Meroe and their leaders were black Africans, and historians have noted that the kingdom was so powerful that it had attempted the conquest of the land of the Egyptians. When the soldiers of the Prophet, Muslim Arabs, began to subjugate Christian Sudanese, Darfurians initially resisted and were conquered. Just as the 25th Egyptian dynasty subjugated most of the northern area of what is now known as Sudan, the Arab Muslims conquered and controlled South Sudan and Darfur.

The atrocities committed by the conquerors in the process of the Islamization of Christians and followers of traditional African religions bordered on genocide, and the rampant racism of the occupiers and the introduction of slavery into the region sealed the fate of many Darfurians. The new system opened the way to the sexual exploitation of women and child labor. Thus it would not be an exaggeration to state that today's Darfur insurrection is an anti-slavery rebellion conducted in the 21st century.

In the south, the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army under the late John Grang, fought the Khartoum government to a standstill for almost three decades and has finally had its voice heard. Today it has established *de facto* independence. The Machako Agreement signed between Khartoum and the SPLA in Kenya gives the vice presidency of the Sudan government to the president of the SPLA. In addition, the agreement guarantees, at least on the level of theory, a fair and balanced scheme for economic development and a formula for



SLA Rebels rest in territory that is now free from government rule. The Sudanese government and their Janjaweed militias began attacking Darfur's civilian population in response to an SLA-led rebellion in 2003. (Photo by Shane Bauer)

wealth sharing. It also assures self-rule up to six years, after which a referendum is to be held in the south on whether to stay within Sudan or opt for *de jure* independence. The SPLA has forced the Khartoum government to make key concessions to end the conflict and the government has acquiesced, forced also by international pressures.

However, while peace is holding in the south, no olive branch has been offered in Darfur. The inhabitants of Darfur continue to suffer from the maniacal raids of the state-sponsored Arab militias and government helicopter gun ships. These raids so far have claimed the lives of 300,000 people and displaced 2.5 million inhabitants who have become refugees. Those affected by the terror are estimated at about 4 million and close to a million of those are beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance.

The Darfur insurrection started in 1987. The year is important because it was a year of famine in the region and also a time when Arab Muslims began to organize and provoke the Darfurians, namely, the *Fur*, *Zagawa*, and *Massalit* farmers. The government soon began to organize the Janjaweed, the mounted Arab militia that has operated in league with the government to push largely African ethnic groups out of the area. This was a period of rising ethnic antagonisms. The civil war in neighboring Chad began to spill over across the border bringing with it a supremacist ideology that was adopted by some Arabs giving rise to the Janjaweed.

The creation of the Janjaweed was a direct consequence of the ethnic composition of the Sudanese regular army. For decades the army had been mostly composed of Kordofan Nubas and some Darfurians. Since military service did not exactly appeal to Nile-based Arab elites

who have dominated the political process, and because Darfurian troops were considered unreliable in fighting their people, the government came up with the idea of having a fighting force imbued with racial hatred that would stamp out the Darfur rebellion. It found this fighting force among northern pastoralists who had suffered from the desertification of their pasturelands. Although allegations have been made that the government recruits Janjaweed from the "Arab" tribes of Chad, most of the recruits are immigrants or their descendants from West Africa who, for one reason or another, have been Islamized.

In any case, the provocations by the Janjaweed quickly turned into direct attacks using modern weapons secretly provided by the Sudanese central government of Sadiq al Mahdi. These attacks and the government's open policy of disarming Darfurians led to outrage and to the establishment of the *Fur* self-defense militia, which was renamed the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA). When Arab pastoralists refused to pay blood money for atrocities committed against Zagawa farmers, the Zagawa joined the SLA.

According to Minni Arkoi Minawi, leader of the SLA and a former English teacher, the manifesto of the Sudanese Liberation Army gives as its purpose the establishment of a nation in which the diverse peoples can live within a framework of determining their own destiny, live in political equality, where there is no discrimination based on race or in the distribution of economic goods. However, before these lofty goals could be realized, the SLA split into two groups. The majority group favored Minni Arkoi Minawi and the other group went under the leadership of Abdulwahid Mohammed Alnur, a Fur.

A different armed group operating in Darfur is the Justice for Equality Movement (JEM), whose beginnings and agenda are a bit different from those of the SLA. In 1989, General Omar Albashir overthrew the Sadiq al Mahdi government in a military coup. The coup was successful in part because an important politician and Muslim scholar, the Sorbonne-educated Ph.D., Dr. Sheik Hassan Al-Turabi, was a key behind-the-scenes leader of the new government. In 1991, Al-Turabi became the General Secretary of the National Islamic Front (NIF), which facilitated the building of a network of Islamic organizations and officials from the local population in far-flung Darfur. In 1999, Al-Turabi brought the government of Sudan to a standstill when he requested that parliament devolve some of the powers of the all-powerful presidency. The situation led to a crisis, to the dissolving of parliament, to the firing of thousands of NIF members from government posts, and to the declaration of a state of emergency. During this period, NIF-sponsored black African officials who had been organized by Al-Turabi in Darfur lost their livelihood overnight. In 2003, they formed the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), which is led by Dr. Khalil Ibrahim Muhammad, an Al-Turabi supporter. Muhammad was the author of *The Black Book: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in the Sudan*, an outlawed manifesto that claims that Nile-based Arabs have dominated the government at the expense of the majority of Sudanese. Indeed historically, the British colonial rulers after tacking Darfur on to Sudan in 1917, only provided education in Darfur to the sons of chiefs, so as not to produce challengers to



Although the Sudanese government controls the large cities, most of the territory in Darfur is now controlled by various rebel groups. (Photo by Shane Bauer)

their authority. As a consequence, in 1935, the region had only one elementary school. There was no maternity clinic until the 1940s, and when Sudan attained independence in 1956 Darfur had few hospitals and very little infrastructure and endured a policy of malign neglect by the national elite, raising the question of whether Darfur had a future in Sudan. Thus, when the Darfur rebellion began, the JEM was a natural ally and its units cooperated with SLA forces in the opening phase. Although initially the Khartoum government had tried to cut a separate peace with the SLA, the latter had demanded that both the SLA and the JEM be part of the peace process

In mid-2004, the Darfur tragedy forced itself into the international arena. In sharp contrast to the official U.S. reaction to the Rwandan massacres under the Clinton administration, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell called the situation in Darfur "genocide." He accused the Sudanese government of using famine and mass rape as weapons of war. But such castigation was for international consumption. Sudan, after all, is a major oil producer and has become a critical ally of the U.S. in its war against terror. Thus neither the U.S. nor the European Union prodded the United Nations for international sanctions. But the irony is that southern Darfur also contains significant unexploited oil reserves that are attracting diverse international interest into the region from countries such as China, Britain, the US and some Horn of Africa nations that have their own agendas.

By May 5, 2006, the African Union (AU) managed to get some of the rebels to join with the government in Khartoum in signing the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in Abuja, Nigeria. But the peace agreement seems to have actually made security worse because it removed the capacity of Darfurians to defend themselves against the Janjaweed, which is critical to civilians in the area. Only one of the three major rebel groups involved in Darfur's forty-month civil war signed the DPA with the government of Sudan. That group is the SLA faction headed by Minni Arkoi Minawi. This SLA faction announced that it would honor the ceasefire imposed by the agreement and moved its major fighting force north, where Minawi is fighting for control of his own ethnic group, the Zagawa.

By ending offensive operations that used to keep the Janjaweed at bay, the SLA faction of Minni Arkoi Minawi has let security of the people deteriorate so

badly that the local SLA force is a ragtag army without equipment. Many of its fighters are children armed with clubs. And Khartoum has done little to disarm the Janjaweed, which is terrorizing the people such as the *Massalit* in villages and on farms. AU troops that have been sent to Darfur rarely conduct aggressive patrolling that could provide a deterrent to the violence, claiming they are not mandated to conduct patrols but are expected only to report cease-fire violations.

Meanwhile, Minawi and his forces that are signatories to the Darfur Peace Agreement have been conducting a reign of terror throughout villages in North Darfur in an effort to fight the rival SLA faction led by Abdulwahid Mohammed Alnur and others who have rejected the Peace Agreement. The violence has been focused against civilians; the killing has targeted young men. The internecine conflict has contributed to the displacement of tens of thousands of people.

In August 2006, the three Darfur rebel groups that had refused to sign the African Union peace deal met in Asmara, Eritrea, and

formed a new alliance to fight the Khartoum government. They called themselves the National Redemption Front (NRF). The front consists of the Justice and Equality Movement, a holdout faction of the original Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), and the Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA). The NRF rejects the Darfur Peace Agreement, otherwise known as the "Abuja Document," and claims the "front will not only deal with Darfur issues but all issues in the Sudan." The NRF is also expected to renew calls for Sudan to replace African Union troops with a UN peacekeeping mission. Meanwhile, the AU, which has threatened sanctions against groups that do not accept the peace deal, will mull over this latest development during its upcoming summit in Gambia as it scrambles for an "African solution" to the conundrum: Whither Darfur?



Photo by Shane Bauer

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QUEER EYE

Was Mayor's Forum Farce?

by Dan Waterhouse

When he convened the Forum for Civic Understanding this past April, Fresno Mayor Alan Autry picked up where he left off in 2004 before his "defense of traditional marriage event" at City Hall.

According to city documents, Autry chose the topic of "the community relationship between heterosexual and homosexual people in Fresno." Autry said he picked the topic for the first forum because "I care about all the citizens of this city and all of our families. And I am concerned that the harsh rhetoric of political demonstrations on both sides of this issue (committed relationships) hurts all of us."

He selected participants who he hoped to be "informed civic leaders, clergy, business people and citizens coming from varying perspectives who are willing to listen to one another and work together when common interests are discovered." The only "leaders of the gay/

lesbian community" invited were Robin McGehee and Diana Bohn of the Gay Straight Alliance Network and Robin Greiner and Ellis Vance from the Central California Alliance. No representatives from groups such as Community Link (which organizes the annual Pride Parade) or the Imperial Dove Court were invited.

The forum was facilitated by Rev. Bryan Jessup of the Interfaith Alliance and Dr. Ron Claasen of Fresno Pacific University. It was patterned after the Radio Forum for a Better Understanding, which was broadcast on KMJ every week from 1937 to 1954.

According to McGehee, Autry told those attending that he had had a burden on his heart for two years because of the City Hall event in August 2004. Autry explained the burden was that there were two groups in the community now at odds with one another. However, McGehee said, Autry repeatedly made statements justifying what he had done in 2004. According to her, Autry kept bringing up the San Francisco marriages and kept saying that same-sex marriage was an issue to just a few, radicals in the queer community.

McGehee confirmed Autry's statements about same-sex marriage were identical to those he made at a meeting he had with representatives from Community Link and Central California Alliance in August 2004, shortly before the City Hall rally. Autry asked for that meeting to "explain" to the queer community why he was holding the rally.

Gail Gaston, representing the city's Human Relations Commission at the forum, echoed McGehee's comments. Gaston said she felt the forum was something done by Autry to rid himself of guilt over the 2004 marriage rally. She added that Autry and Rev. Jim Franklin of Cornerstone Church firmly stood on their religious beliefs and tried to explain why they actively campaign against gay and lesbian relationships.

Franklin was the other organizer of the 2004 City Hall rally.

According to Ellis Vance, some of the issues raised included: a committed relationship is a relationship between two people who love each other and are committed to each other for a lifetime, regardless of sexual orientation; should the Bill of Rights be for the purpose of supporting and protecting the rights of all citizens or for taking them away; the government should recognize committed relationships for all its citizens; laws should not be based on particular religious beliefs, doctrines, or dogma.



Credo

by Richard Stone

To complement "Grassroots Profiles", I'm initiating this month a variation called "Credo", Latin for "I believe". These articles are to be based on interviews with older members of our progressive community, and will attempt to uncover the sustaining underpinnings for a life of social activism. Since the questionnaire I've developed for these interviews is less direct than the one used for "Profiles", I decided to test it out on the most willing victim around: me. So here is the interview with Richard Stone, a director of the Fresno Center for Nonviolence and the Community Alliance, yoga instructor and proprietor of Partnerships in Understanding.

Q) What are the principles, articles of faith, and vision that guide your activities?

A) I believe we are part of a universe that is evolving in ways we hardly understand, and each of us is a unique bit of energy that can either assist in, or detract from, a successful evolutionary project. I believe we live in the midst of a great paradoxical directive: to be true to our individuality, while respecting the great ordering principles that have led us this far.

Q) How do you come to these beliefs?

mindfulness, and above all to not harbor resentment whatever the source.

Q) Who else has been a significant teacher or example?

A) The way into social responsibility was opened by my working at a summer camp that welcomed kids across ethnic and class lines, including kids with some degree of physical or psychological disability; and by joining the Peace Corps leading to a 2-year sojourn in Ethiopia. I was propelled into public activism as a result of my double "coming out" at around the age of 30 as a Jew and as a gay man.

The examples of Gandhi and Malcolm X have influenced me deeply. I've worked closely with two teachers who significantly impacted me. The first was Judith Binetter, an Israeli teacher of body awareness (and a refugee from Nazi Germany) who inducted me into an understanding of "living in the body" and profound interpenetrating relationship—I call her "my Fateful Other." The other was George "Elfie" Ballis, who is best known as our movement videographer, but who I first knew through his "tribal work" at Sun Mt., which greatly enhanced for me the integration of personal and public understanding into, as he puts it, impeccable action.

Q) What are your present sources of guidance and inspiration?

A) From several sources, including reading and association with teachers, but primarily from powerful personal experiences that led me to an unconventional understanding of what "living a life" means.

Q) What has changed for you over the years?

A) I have come from constant anxiety to relative peace amid the seemingly opposed demands of enacting one's "will and skill" on one side, and being a creature embedded in nature on the other. I have come to see there aren't predetermined right answers in difficult situations, but at best improvised "satisfyingly effective solutions".

Q) What did you learn from your parents?

A) From my father, I learned the virtues of dedication to one's commitments without complaint, and of giving dependable support to those who rely on you. From my mother I learned broad-spectrum generosity, open-

A) One great arena for learning has been the responsibilities I've been privileged to carry at the Fresno Center for Nonviolence. There several strong-minded people work together under the principle of consensus, and we struggle to maintain focus amid a barrage of competing concerns. The other "practice" has been my 30-year companionship with Avigdar Adams, a uniquely talented, strong-willed and compassionate person, in whose company I've learned that the long-term goodness that radiates from a partnership is at least as important as the day-to-day feelings of "happiness" (or not).

Q) What are your current activist goals deriving from your beliefs?

A) My goals are to promulgate a real understanding of how to live out the Center's 4-point Peace Agenda, so that we work both individually and collectively, at many levels, to find balance. My particular role is often to bring disparate parts of our social system into constructive engagement.

Q) Recommended books, movies, music, expressive of your experiences and beliefs?

A) A few old favorite writers are novelists Dostoyevsky and Doris Lessing, and spiritual teacher Krishnamurti. With music, Broadway musicals were my introduction to the life of emotion. My current preference runs to world music, like Nusrat Fatah Ali Khan, and Yiddish Klezmer music. A couple of movies that have touched me: French films Children of Paradise and And Now My Love; musicals Cabaret and Little Shop of Horrors; gay-themed Maurice and Philadelphia; and Gandhi.

Q) A favorite piece of writing (yours or someone else's)

A) A client once commissioned me to write a brief compendium of suggestions I'd made as she coped with depression and confusion. I call it "Guidelines for Time Travel to the Present", and here are a couple of paragraphs from it:

I am limited in my abilities, intelligence, judgment, energy. I act without certainty and I make errors. This is my human condition, not a genetic flaw or failure of character...

The single most important thing I have to do each day is face my reality. Take in my situation; ascertain what needs to be done; obtain information about things I'm unsure of, seeking advice and perspective from others; discover what is lacking and direct attention toward making needed changes; rest—without complacency or agitation—in imperfection...

I can either strive to understand the meaning of life, or I can live it. There are no right answers to life's questions. There is only continuing improvisation, done more or less skillfully, serving to set up the next scene. My best bet is to enter in as fully as possible, with attention and effort...then see what happens. I am now in the next situation. This is the present. This is living.

Contact info: Phone:266-2559; e-mail: richard2662559@yahoo.com###



Simone Whalen-Rhodes and Conn Hallinan
All photos on pages 14 and 15 by Howard Watkins.



Some of the Community Alliance Editorial Board members - from left to right: Richard Stone, Pam Whalen, Mike Rhodes, the Rev. Floyd Harris Jr.

Community Alliance Celebrates 10th Anniversary

by Conn Hallinan



Conn Hallinan gave the keynote address (the text of the speech is re-printed on this page)

The alternative press is a difficult subject to get one's hands around in a short talk. It is a subject that best lends itself to either a one-second blurb—"Do it"—or a six-hour lecture. I want to try to do this in a half hour. So if you will bear with me a moment, I would like to open this talk with a paragraph from the alternative press:

"These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it NOW, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered."



Maria Erefia from Radio Bilingue 91.5 FM

Thomas Paine, December 23, 1776

When Paine wrote those words it was not the best of times, and there was a reason why Paine entitled his newspaper, The Crisis. George Washington had been decisively defeated on Long Island and the city of New York had fallen. By December 23, 1776, the Continental Army was in full retreat across New Jersey. Things couldn't be much worse for the American Revolution than they were at that moment.

As we all know, it turned around, but a good deal of that turn around was due to Thomas Paine and his essays that informed and fired people's imagination throughout the colonies. Washington ordered Paine's words from the Crisis read to his troops before they crossed the Delaware in a blizzard and attacked Trenton for one of the most important victories of the Revolutionary War.

Common Sense, which was published in January 1776, sold 100,000 copies within two months, one for every 25 people in the colonies. Until Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" came out in 1852, it was the number one best seller in U.S. history.



Bill Balsley, general manager of the low power KVLP-LP radio station in Visalia

Both Paine and Stowe used words—in Paine's case set in argument and logic; in Stowe's case, embedded in the power of fiction—to change people's consciousness. The first helped build a revolution against colonialism, the second, to provoke a revolution against slavery. The fact that one was a news essay and the other a novel is irrelevant. Both used prose to alter the thinking of a nation.

The Crisis and Uncle Tom's Cabin were outside the mainstream. They were outside precisely because they challenged the dominant wisdom and culture of the day. The



Food Not Bombs provided a wonderful dinner for everyone

mainstream mass media of those times was very different in form than it is today, but not in content. There was a New York Times, but it only cost a penny, and its slogan was not "All the News that's Fit To Print," but "will not soil the breakfast cloth." Also there was no Anne Coulter and the Texas Chainsaw Massacre II (Sorry, I always see these last two things as somehow cohabitating the same stream of ideology)

In a sense, the history of our country is also the history of the alternative press.

In 1827, John Russwurm and Rev. Samuel Cornish pub-



Elfie Ballis became the events jester. He showed us a new docu-poem video compilation of local actions for peace and justice that he and Maia produced. He also sang and spoke passionately about the need for the community to support alternative/independent media



Dan Yaseen and Pat Wolk



Ellie Bluestein and City Council member Cynthia Sterling



Susan and Mike Rowe