Resist Newsletter, Nov-Dec 2007

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RESIST Celebrates Its 40th Anniversary

ROBIN CARTON & CAROL SCHACHET

Radical politics and a kick-ass party—that sums up RESIST’s 40th anniversary celebration in October, where hundreds heard some of today’s leading progressive voices discuss grassroots activism. And then danced!

This issue of the Newsletter offers a taste of the fun and spirited thinking from that event. You will find remarks from our panelists on the question of resisting illegitimate authority today—the theme of RESIST since its founding in 1967 during the Vietnam War.

RESIST
259 Elm Street, Suite 201
Somerville, MA 02144
www.resistinc.org
resistinc@igc.org
617/623-5110
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Inside: How We Resist Illegitimate Authority Today

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Inside: How We Resist Illegitimate Authority Today

Noam Chomsky, a RESIST founding member and leading critic of US imperialism, compares then and now. Outspoken military resister Camilo Mejia tells his story of conscientious objection against the Iraq War that rages beyond the line of sight of most Americans. Mandy Carter, strategist and organizer in the Black, LGBTQ and women’s movements, challenges us to think and act beyond whatever subgroup of the movement we find ourselves in. For labor activist Bill Fletcher, Jr., the future calls for a new kind of confederation. And radio and independent journalist Laura Flanders looks beyond mainstream sources to call for accountability and change.

The 40th Anniversary gathering provided an opportunity to consider RESIST’s roots and impact on movements for social and economic justice. As the song says, those roots run deep.

continued on page eight
It's 40 years since we issued the "Call to resist illegitimate authority." I thought at the time that it was quite an appropriate and powerful document, despite some reservations that I had about the title of the document. When we talk about "resisting illegitimate authority," it presupposes that illegitimate authority is somehow an oddity, that the norm is legitimate authority. We should really look at it the other way around. Authority is illegitimate, it has to prove itself, and it very rarely can. The burden of proof is on authority, not on opposing authority, and that's true in every aspect of life.

The title of "the Call" made sense at the time because the idea of resisting authority was pretty much on the margin. In 1967, there wasn't much of a sense of challenging institutions, but rather mostly kind of a cultural challenge—to do things differently, or to be a hippie or something like that. In contrast, the idea of actually challenging existing institutions and their behavior was pretty remote from consciousness.

The Roots of RESIST

Nowadays things look pretty ugly in many ways, but it looked a lot worse in 1967. By then, the effectiveness of the civil rights movement as a mass popular movement ran aground when it addressed questions of class. When the focus shifted from racist sheriffs in Alabama to hit privilege and power, it quickly collapsed. It's worth recalling that Martin Luther King was assassinated when he was planning to lead a Poor People's Movement, something that was not acceptable.

At the time we issued the "Call to resist," the civil rights movement had pretty well disappeared. There was barely the beginning of a feminist movement. There was no environmental movement, and no one talked about issues like gay rights. Repression at that time was far more severe than it is today. There's nothing now like COINTELPRO, for example. A major government operation that ran through four administrations, mainly Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, COINTELPRO was carried out by the national political police, the FBI, tar-
most of the rest of Indo-China.

Unlike Vietnam, the Iraq War is the first one in the history of western imperialism as far as I can recall where there was mass popular protest before the war was even officially launched. And it continues, not at a level that we'd all like to see, but way beyond the level of any comparable stage of the Vietnam War.

The situation now is one in which we can think seriously about resisting authority across a broad spectrum. When you take a look at the country now, I suspect that if you counted noses, there's much more activism than there was in the '60s. It's separated into atomized small groups, but it's there. And in fact we can see even in intensive studies of public opinion how deep it is. By now both political parties are way to the right of the population on a host of major issues, crucial issues, which means that there is a basis for organizing resistance to authority, the authority that shouldn't exist. Let me give you two examples.

One of the main international issues we face is a possible U.S. invasion of Iran. The leading British military historian, Corelli Barnett, wrote that if it happens we'll be in World War III. I don't know about that, but certainly it will be extremely ugly and horrible. What do the American people think about it? Intensive polls of Iranians and Americans by WorldPublicOpinion.org show that they basically agree on a reasonable settlement of Iran/U.S. conflicts. The vast majority—about 75 percent—agree that Iran has a right to nuclear power as a signer of the nonproliferation treaty, but should not have nuclear weapons.

By the same overwhelming major-

...
Saying “No” to an Illegitimate War

CAMILO MEJÍA

I wish I could say that I have a long history of resistance, but my resistance began fairly recently in the United States military. There are very few places where you can resist illegitimate authority more than in the military, because we’re engaged in this horrible illegitimate war.

My first opportunity to resist came to me in 2003, when my company commander announced to our unit that we were deploying to the Middle East in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. At that point I had been reading the news and I had a very detached, impersonal opposition to the war because we had not directly tied Iraq to September 11th. Plus people like Hans Blix and Mohammed ElBaradei said that they did not think Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and that they needed more time to investigate. I thought that the Iraqi government was opening all kinds of back door channels to try to not be invaded.

One good day I did resist... The case became a big media sensation. I went to jail and got out, and then I joined Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Finding the moral courage to resist meant that I had to work on my fear. My first opportunity to resist came to me in 2003, when my company commander announced to our unit that we were deploying to the Middle East in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. At that point I had been reading the news and I had a very detached, impersonal opposition to the war because we had not directly tied Iraq to September 11th. Plus people like Hans Blix and Mohammed ElBaradei said that they did not think Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and that they needed more time to investigate. I thought that the Iraqi government was opening all kinds of back door channels to try to not be invaded.

At the time I was really afraid to publicly oppose a war that had not yet begun, with part of me thinking that this might just be a huge show of force to scare Saddam Hussein out of power. I was very naïve back then. With massive resistance to the war throughout the world, I felt that the United States government would ultimately not invade Iraq—even when my unit was stationed in Jordan preparing to go to Iraq. I had been in the military close to eight years. I was a sergeant-promotable, I became a staff sergeant in Iraq. And I had a pretty good military career... until I rebelled, of course.

God and Country and Resistance
Resisting illegitimate authority in the military means many things. This is a pool of people who are not really aware of the law, who are very young, and who are usually very politically unaware, and many of us don't start with an understanding of what is legal or illegal.

That uncertainty about legality came into play quickly with my unit in Iraq. The first mission of our unit was to keep Iraqi prisoners sleep-deprived by creating fear through loud noises and mock executions. We received direct orders from officers to do this kind of thing, and there were a lot of other people doing it. We did not know if it was illegal, but it just felt wrong. We did not know if it was considered torture, since we were not physically hurting them. Later missions included instigating fire fights and conducting missions by hospitals and by mosques—things that we knew would lead to the killing of civilians.

The question of legitimacy is really hard to deal with when you're in the context of the military, so it becomes a question of conscience. It becomes a question of whether what you are doing—regardless of what the law says about it—is something you feel good in your heart about doing. In my case it didn't, and the majority of the things that we did in Iraq did not feel right.

Our main concern was to survive. We were in a very intense environment, and we were being threatened every step of the way. We were concerned about our physical environment, where the next attack was coming from, and how to get home in one piece. There were times, however, when what we were doing seemed to be wrong in spite of the fear, in spite of the confusion and frustration.

“Hell Yes!” Grant

To honor the moral clarity, courage and political commitment of its founders, RESIST announces a new tribute grant, beginning in 2008: The Hell Yes! Award.

This tribute grant recognizes inspiring, radical activism that cuts to the heart of RESIST’s mission to challenge illegitimate authority, with particular emphasis on anti-war and anti-imperialist efforts.
Conscience and Objections

My resistance became a matter of overcoming my own fear. When I finally came home on a two-week furlough, I refused to go back. This was very difficult because of the bonds that I had developed with the people in my unit, which had nothing to do with policies or whether the war is legitimate or illegitimate, but everything to do with the creation of a human bond in a very intense environment. Your life depended on these people, and their lives depended on you and your leadership. I was afraid of being called a coward, of being rejected by my peers, of being called unpatriotic. I was also afraid of being court marshaled; I did not want to go to jail.

Finding the moral courage to resist meant that I had to work on my fear. One good day I did resist, and at the time there were no combat veterans publicly speaking against the war. The case became a big media sensation. I went to jail and got out, and then I joined Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVA W).

Military Resistance Today

I want to talk about resistance in the military and what that looks like today. What I felt to be the calling of my conscience may not be the calling of other people. For instance, we have cases like Joe Darby, who provided the photographs that exposed the scandal at Abu Ghraib Prison. He did not go public right away. He is someone who went to Iraq and did his job at Abu Ghraib, and who felt that his conscience was telling him that he needed to make people aware of what was happening there.

Then there is the case of Suzanne Swift, who was the victim and now survivor of military sexual assault. She initially resisted the war not on political grounds, but on the grounds that she refused to be assaulted.

We have people like Ehren Watada, the first commissioned officer to refuse orders to deploy to Iraq on the basis that the war in Iraq was illegitimate and illegal. He did not go AWOL, and he's not a conscientious objector. He's even opposed to the war in Afghanistan.

We need all these types of resistance, and we need to understand that resisting is not necessarily going to take the shape or form that we want it to take. We have to work with all the ways people resist.

An organization like Iraq Veterans Against War (IVA W) tries to bring all of these people together as a united front to strengthen resistance to this war. IVA W is concentrated on organizing active duty bases. We have a chapter at Fort Drum, New York, where we started the first GI coffee house opposed to the war, called A Different Drummer Café, located right outside of the base.

Resistance in the military also means launching counter-recruiting and counter-retention campaigns. It means telling people that they should not stay in the military because this war is illegal, and that they have every right to refuse. It means telling them that they not only have the right but the duty to refuse this illegitimate war. Our goal is ultimately to remove military support from the war. We are concentrating our efforts on making sure that the government can no longer rely on the military to wage an illegal, illegitimate and immoral war on other countries. That's our struggle.

Resistance in the military is not going to be effective unless there's resistance in the larger society. When I first decided not to go back to Iraq, the anti-war movement had basically become demoralized after the invasion. IVA W was not formed yet, and my opposition was very isolating at the time because there was little organized response to the war. Fortunately, there were people and organizations that helped me tremendously, like Military Families Speak Out, and, later, groups like Code Pink and Veterans for Peace.

Moving Beyond Isolation

Beyond the anti-war movement and the GI side of that resistance, I don't think that people are taking ownership of this war. That's one reason I would support a draft, and then I would advocate for 100% resistance to it. Kidding aside, I don't actually support a draft, but conscription would force middle-class America to face the possibility that their children might actually fight in a war that we know for a fact is horrible.

Part of the problem is that people are not really given the opportunity to experience the war, especially as compared with the Vietnam War. Back then, we had pictures and footage—the naked girl running from napalm, soldiers posing with dead Vietnamese. Today we are not even allowed to see the coffins coming back from the war. We're not allowed to see the maimed and wounded. We don't hear enough about post traumatic stress disorder and suicide rates going through the roof. All of these things send the message that "this is not your war." You hear that 10, maybe 15 soldiers died this week, but people are not really being touched by it. We have .05 percent of the population directly affected by this war, and that's not enough to get people to go into the streets. That's not enough to get people to take ownership, to really identify with the anti-war movement.

We need more than just the soldiers to refuse to fight. It's going to take the larger public to come together and send a message to the government, to stand against the war, and to protect those who refuse to fight. The anti-war effort needs more than the military to be successful.

RESIST: The Movie!

Pop some popcorn, log on to your computer and watch 40 years of funding social change!

www.resistinc.org/events.html

Special thanks to Advisory Board member Pam Chamberlain, who compiled 40 years of activism and grant-making into an 8-minute slide show with music. Enjoy!

Camilo Mejia is a former Staff Sergeant of the Florida National Guard, an anti-war activist and the author of Road from Ar Ramadi: The Private Rebellion of Staff Sergeant Mejia. He also serves as chair of the board of directors of Iraq Veterans Against the War.
Hundreds of area activists and supporters (and many from far outside the area as well) joined in RESIST's 40th Anniversary celebration at the Arlington (MA) Town Hall on October 13, 2007. The event featured a panel, music, dancing, a retrospective slideshow, grantee testimonies, and a whole lot more. You can view the slideshow by visiting RESIST's website: www.resistinc.org.

In addition, many of RESIST's early founders, past Board members and staffers joined current Board, staff and anniversary planners at a brunch the following morning. They told stories, reminisced and reconnected.

Photos were taken by Anh Dao Kolbe, unless otherwise indicated.

Nikhil Aziz and Pam Chamberlain served as the evening's emcees.

Below: Supporters filled the floor of Arlington Town Hall during the panel discussion.

RESIST Board members Catherine Joseph and Shirley Royster

Cathy Hoffman, Jean Hardisty and Betty Burkes

Above: The Second Line Pleasure and Social Aid Society Brass Band provided music for the evening.

Left: Board member Diana Digges cuts a rug to the honk band sound.

Below: Murray Rosenblith met up with long-time friend Mandy Carter.

Early RESISTers still fight the power. Photo includes (left) Ohmann, Hilde Hein, Saul Slapikoff, Claudette Piper, Frank.

The anniversary kicked off with sparkling pol.

Mejia, Mandy Carter, Noam Chomsky and m.

Above: Malena Mayorga and RESIST staff member Yafreisy Mejia. Photo by Ellen Shub
Left: Board members Marc Miller and Sophia Kim introduce the panel. Photo by Ellen Shub

Above: RESIST staffer Carol Schachet and Board member Leila Farsakh enjoy the festivities.

Above right: Mara Taub, a RESIST grant recipient from the Coalition for Prisoners Rights in Santa Fe, NM, joins others to read the original “Call to resist illegitimate authority.”

Below: Current and former RESIST Board members, staff and volunteers share stories and memories. Photo by Robin Carton

Linda McIntosh joins the bidding at the silent auction.

Above: Every party needs a good cake.
Below: Frank Joyce and Laura Flanders

Jermaine Carter, Anthony Clark and James Cain offered their reflections on the importance of RESIST’s grant to EPOCA.

Below: RESIST Staffer Robin Carton, Tarso Ramos and Board member Nikhil Aziz. Photo by Ellen Shub


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A Short History of RESIST

RESIST was born 40 years ago with a “Call to resist illegitimate authority,” urging support for those refusing to serve in the Vietnam War. The original “Call,” which circulated in public as well as private ways, was eventually signed by over 20,000 people. The approximately 200 initial signers included Noam Chomsky, Grace Paley, Dr. Benjamin Spock, the Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr., Denise Levertov, Dwight Macdonald, Allen Ginsberg, the Rev. Robert MacAfee Brown, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, W. H. Ferry, Mitchell Goodman, David Dellinger, Barbara Guest, and Marcus Raskin, among others.

On October 2, 1967, Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr., read the “Call” at a press conference at the New York Hilton. Speakers outlined the anti-draft initiatives scheduled to take place in the coming weeks. Attendees were then invited to a meeting at Columbia University to delineate priorities, decide how to implement the goals outlined in the “Call to resist,” and create a temporary steering committee which would be in charge of distributing funds and meeting monthly to report on activities. RESIST was formed at that meeting.

Two weeks later, more than 5,000 people responded at a rally on the Boston Common. Local clergy, academics, and others urged Americans to remember their moral conscience and avoid blindly following national policies that violate "international agreements, treaties and principles of law which the United States Government has solemnly endorsed." These governmental policies, hauntingly similar to the current war in Iraq, included destroying crops, livestock and civilian structures, internment civilian non-combatants in camps, inflicting torture and summary executions. The government’s actions were always justified by raising the fear that the “enemy” could be on our doorstep and by claims that victory was just around the corner.

“The Call” became a central document (titled “Overt Act #1”) in the conspiracy trial of five men charged with conspiring to “counsel, aid, and abet Selective Service registrants to evade military service and refuse to carry draft cards.” Those indicted included a group known as the Boston Five: Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr.; Harvard graduate student Michael Ferber; teacher and writer Mitchell Goodman; Marcus Raskin, a former National Security Council staffer and Washington think-tank leader; and pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock.

The very first grants RESIST awarded all went to anti-war and student organizing projects. However, it soon became apparent that the war itself wasn’t isolated from other governmental policies.

RESIST broadened its perspective and within two years funded prison support work, community organizing in Black neighborhoods, and a range of projects in high schools.

Clearly, the reason RESIST survived its early years is that it maintained a primary emphasis on peace, anti-war and anti-militarism issues. Over the years, however, the proportional relationship between that emphasis and others has shifted in response to changes in the movement as a whole.

RESIST plays a critical role in introducing activists to progressive philanthropy. Some, such as the Center for Constitutional Rights, Global Exchange and the Center for Third World Organizing now have annual budgets larger than ours. RESIST also provided the first grants to Lois Gibbs as she struggled to organize her community to confront the environmental disaster at Love Canal. Now her organization (the Center for Health, Environment and Justice) plays a leading role in grassroots advocacy for healthy communities everywhere.

RESIST Today

In 2007, RESIST is alive and well, funding nearly 150 grassroots groups each year, supporting anti-racist work; full human rights for women, gay men and lesbians and those with disabilities; labor and environmental activism; and Third World solidarity, as well as anti-war and anti-corporate globalization initiatives.

Today, more organizations are working for social change in this country than at any time in RESIST’s history. As one of the first funding stops for many groups, we play a critical role by: enabling organizations to respond quickly to pressing challenges with one of the fastest turnaround times for grantmaking in the country; providing general support which allows grantees to build infrastructure and capacity while engaged in ongoing social justice activism; offering technical assistance grants to ensure activists can get help with training, consultation, or restructuring as they lay the groundwork to become stronger, dynamic organizations; and introducing activists to the larger role of progressive philanthropy and connecting them to other potential funding sources.

Now as at its founding, RESIST relies on the support of individuals committed to peace, economic justice, human dignity and environmental sustainability in order to keep its doors open—and to help groups across the country do the same. The spirit, conviction and power of RESIST still lie in bringing together the people who fund and who build a movement for social change.

Robin Carton and Carol Schachet have been RESIST staffers for the past 12 years. This article includes material gathered from years of research and writing, particularly from the work of Tatiana Schreiber.
Moving from “Just Us” to Justice

MANDY CARTER

I first heard about RESIST in 1969, the year that I joined the San Francisco War Resisters League. RESIST wanted to find a way for those of us who were not draftable—women and men over a certain age—to be able to make a personal testament of resistance to the Vietnam War. At that point, it was illegal to “aid and abet” anyone who did not comply with the draft, so the action of signing the “Call to resist illegitimate authority” put signers at risk of five years in prison or a $5,000 fine.

Those who chose to sign the “Call to resist” expressed individual accountability and understood its possible consequences. Others did things like questioned the war tax—who’s paying for this war? In these ways, the idea of nonviolent resistance and direct action impacts each of our lives, underscoring the role individuals play in demonstrating opposition.

RESIST was also instrumental as one of the first and main sources of funding for another group called Southerners on New Ground (SONG). SONG wanted to figure out how to do organizing in the South in a way that would connect issues of race, class, culture, gender, and sexual identity. We understood that we had to find the common denominators between people and to find models of organizing that would allow us to do work based around those connections. SONG believed that was an interesting way of doing work, particularly in the South, and if we could find models that work in the South, we could do it elsewhere.

SONG and other grassroots groups continue to organize in North Carolina, many with help from RESIST. The movement community in North Carolina, which incidentally outlasted Jesse Helms, remains determined in our opposition to the war. One out of every five troops deployed to Iraq comes from the state of North Carolina, home of Fort Bragg Army Base, Camp Lejeune Marine Base, and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base.

Moving Forward Together

I remember sitting in front of my television set when we invaded Iraq the first time in 1991. It was Martin Luther King Day when the first bombs were dropped. I just burst into tears, wondering: If this is how wars are now started, then how do we figure out ways to resist the institution of militarism and war today?

Two things are on my mind as we move forward in our organizing and our movement. First, American society is more global than ever. When we think about all the different movements that exist out there, how do we find the common denominator so we don't feel like we're schizophrenically working on this issue or that issue? How do we quite honestly figure out ways in which people of color and allies have a common agenda, or at least can sit around the same table? Rather than looking at what prevents us from organizing, what would happen if we found out what those common denominators are, or if we identify the common pieces of work that would have us sitting at a similar table?

Here are some thoughts: jobs, housing, health, education. These common underlying concerns might be a good way to start some of the work that has to happen. For example, living wage campaigns that are happening all across the country come out of that. Health care provides another common ground issue that affects us all.

Another example concerns farm labor organizing. The South has a huge agricultural industry. Who is working in those fields? Now it is primarily the Latino community, but prior to a Latino community coming in, it was African Americans. And who would benefit by keeping Latino and African-American workers apart but the agricultural industry?

That is why it was so important that people across race and across immigrant status were able to work together during the boycott against Mt. Olive Pickles that was organized by the Cucumber Farm Labor Organizing Committee (after all, pickles come from cucumbers).

FLOC brought together African Americans, Latinos and the progressive white community to have conversations together and address bad working conditions and low pay. SONG did not hesitate to join the campaign. Why? Because even though we are seen as a gay and lesbian group, our common struggle includes issues of race, class, culture, gender and sexual identity. SONG joined the boycott and five years later, with many groups around the table, we won.

As an out black lesbian, I want to know how our Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) community can find a way to avoid the notion, the pitfall of being about “just us.” There is so much going on in the LGBTQ community right now, from Ellen Degeneres getting her Emmy to WNBA star Cheryl Swoops coming out, things that are culturally incredible. But as movement activists, we need to make sure that we do not get so entrenched in the idea that we’re only about our gay rights that we’re not thinking about anyone else. Because at some point we start bumping up against the very people we need to be having coalitions with.

I joined the movement in 1966 when the American Friends Service Committee came to my high school. They talked about something that has kept me in the movement: the idea of equality and justice for all. That philosophical underpinning keeps us grounded no matter what issues might be out there. That is why we are here. For our movement, I think we have to ask the question, are we about justice or just us? It's got to be about justice.

Mandy Carter has been a long-time RESIST ally, as well as a grant recipient. Photo by Anh Dao Kolhe

Mandy Carter is a founding member of Southerners On New Ground—a RESIST grantee—and the National Black Justice Coalition. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as part of the "1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005."
FORMING A NEW COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

BILL FLETCHER, JR.

In growing up, every Fletcher is reminded that we are the descendants of a man named Tecumseh, one of the greatest leaders of the Shawnee, and of Native Americans. In the first decade of the 19th century, he embarked on a mission ignored by most historians, although Allan W. Ekert wrote an excellent book called, A Sorrow In Our Heart: The Life of Tecumseh, that I would recommend.

Tecumseh came to realize that Native Americans could not defeat the encroaching whites by fighting as Shawnee, as Winnebago, as Iroquois, as Cherokee; nor could they win in a confederation. Pontiac and others had attempted to build confederations, and these had failed because ultimately the component parts often have more identity with—and unity with—that part than the goals of the confederations. Tecumseh believed that Native Americans had to rethink themselves and essentially forge a new identity, that is, as Indians, and move towards the construction of an Indian nation state if they were going to successfully confront the encroaching white Americans. He actually came close to succeeding. But that's for another story.

COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

One of the lessons we can learn from Tecumseh is that for resistance to be successful the oppressed must assert a collective identity that defines them in positive terms and builds a linkage across various boundaries of the particular oppressions. Tecumseh recognized this fact. He fought against the idea that the Shawnee need to continue to war against the Cherokee, or that it was acceptable to remain furious with the Iroquois because of things that had been done, but put forward the idea that there needed to be the forging of this new identity. And in fact, every successful national liberation struggle and any successful movement has come to exactly the same conclusion: A new, collective identity of the oppressed must be formed.

So we must do likewise, particularly because the compelling need is for us to build a movement that in fact can fight for and gain power and not just resist. To borrow from the Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci, this means that our search must ultimately be for what he called a new historic bloc—what I call a social/political bloc—that can fight for power and begin the process of transformation. In this sense resistance, contrary to the “Borg” for those of you who are Star Trek fans, resistance is essential (not futile), but it's insufficient. There comes a time when we have to move beyond being resisters to being a resistance. And when we move beyond being a resistance to becoming a movement of the majority in search of the struggle for power to change our environment, we begin a process of social transformation.

The question now is how do we form such a collective bloc, or what is the basis of this collective identity? In Tecumseh's situation, the answer was actually fairly obvious, although not simple. The construction of a new national identity made perfect sense with an enemy that was very clear and was attempting to squalch out the national existence of a people. We have a more complicated situation in which it is more a question of the oppressed coming to see themselves in and of that bloc. So the first thing is that we need to be able to see our interests represented there, as opposed to seeing it as simply a matter of external solidarity, that is, of doing something for someone else. Our interests are aligned with, and quite literally in, that bloc.

The second thing requires that we avoid an historical pitfall and, contrary to much of the past practice of progressive social movements, refuse to settle for the “lowest common denominator” unity. Usually this means let's forget about race and pretend it doesn't exist in order to build whatever unity we can in the face of what's called common oppression. That simply doesn't work because of the historical foundation of the United States. Therefore, in forging this bloc we have to be mindful of history when we move forward.

Such mindfulness is very dicey because it makes it hard. For example, when Dennis Kucinich ran for President in 2004, his candidacy offered an incredible opportunity for mass movement-building, but Kucinich didn't want to touch race. He didn't want to deal with what should have been his natural base to build the kind of bloc that I'm talking about. I think each time we try avoiding that trip wire it goes off.

THE LONG STRUGGLE

Let me close with one thing that's been troubling me but it's very relevant, I think, to the question of resistance. Over the last number of years I've noticed this rise of people who have decided to renounce and to leave the United States because they're sick of the United States and it's time to move on to some other place. Now I would say that if you were W.E.B. DuBois you had absolutely a reason to leave the United States, because in fact you were chased out of the United States. And there are many people, lesser known than Dubois, who in fact have been and will continue to be chased out of the United States, that is, where there is a threat to your actual life and livelihood. That is different from simply walking away out of frustration with the USA. If one is frustrated and believes that nothing more can be accomplished, then one should leave, but not make a pronouncement about it. All that accomplishes is the furtherance of despair. I would suggest that we are morally obligated to resist the Empire. Ultimately what we do provide the space for the rest of the planet to breathe or to suffocate (if we fail to act). That's why our resistance—and the work of RESIST—remains so essential.

Bill Fletcher, Jr., is a longtime labor and international activist, a former co-chair and founder of United for Peace and Justice, and a co-founder of the Black Radical Congress.
Media, Resistance and Grit

LAURA FLANDERS

I have good news and bad news. Usually I would start with the bad and move to the good, but in this case I'm going to start with the good.

As I traveled around the country promoting my book Blue Grit—a book about grassroots activism and what the Democratic leadership could learn from the base if they felt like it—I found groups all across the country resisting authority. These groups are doing even more. They are figuring out how to reconfigure responsible authority, how to respond to what's happening in their communities, how to wage the sorts of struggles that will create the kinds of institutions that will make our society better, all across the country. And that's what the book is about.

Probably half of these groups I've seen were funded by RESIST, such as the Rural Organizing Project (ROP). When anti-gay panic started spreading in isolated areas, instead of fleeing to the relative safety of cities, ROP convened community gatherings to talk about their neighbors' fears. They created an amazing statewide network of rural activists committed to social justice. That is just one of the small groups that are modeling change by giving people the experience of being deciders in their own lives. This is the kind of organizing that is happening across the country, often funded by RESIST.

Demanding Accountability

That's the good news. The bad news is that while there are hundreds of thousands of people all across the country with a vision for a better country and an idea of how to get there, there is but a handful—and I do mean one handful—of representatives in Congress who even listen to what those people have to say, let alone act responsively towards those people, many of whom have helped them get into office.

That conflict leaves us in a very complicated situation. Just about a year after electing a Democratic majority into Congress to end the war in Iraq, there are more troops in Iraq than ever.

We are left with very serious challenges. Do the Democrats in Washington have legitimate authority right now? How can the rising tide of progressive activism and resistance force Democrats in particular to do what is right? Who can we look to for the models of change that we need in our lives?

Another U.S. is Necessary

Recently I encountered one example at the U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta that poses those questions differently. Given that it was in its hometown, you might think CNN would actually cover the event, but of course it did not. The U.S. Social Forum, the first gathering of its kind ever to happen in this country, attempted to raise the profile of civil society, to connect civil society organizations to each other so they could more effectively become another voice, another power. The slogan of the U.S. Social Forum was “Another World is Possible, Another U.S. is Necessary.”

This was an organizing effort that had been undertaken overwhelmingly by people of color organizations, poor people’s organizations. They didn’t receive foundation support, because the foundations just didn’t believe they could do it—RESIST was one of the few foundations that helped some groups to attend.

Each group that was part of the Organizing Committee for the Social Forum put in $5,000—nearly enough money to hire a part-time worker for a year. They decided that instead of paying a lot of money to send a few people by plane, they would send a lot of people by bus.

Those of us who went to Atlanta with the media—I think it was me and one other person and we called ourselves the medium—we were standing on the side of the street wondering who was going to show up. First we saw some Iraq Veterans Against the War, 15 or 20. After some time had passed, perhaps a few hundred people walked by and I thought, “Okay, they tried.”

Then the word came, the buses had just arrived, and soon we watched as ultimately 15,000 people walked down Peachtree Street in the middle of Atlanta, without help or any say-so from authority. They took over that street, held a weekend of conferences about building power at a level our media almost never cover.

I encourage all of you to support RESIST, because the work you're doing is making all the difference. If you saw it tomorrow on the mainstream nightly news you would know you were probably funding the wrong thing.

I do urge you to continue supporting the independent media that can bring you word—maybe just a little bit of a whisper—about change movements. Resistance work is percolating up from the bottom, often with support from RESIST, so please keep doing the work you’re doing.

Laura Flanders is the host of "Radio-Nation" heard on Air America Radio and syndicated to non-commercial affiliates nationwide. She is the author most recently of Blue Grit: True Democrats Take Back Politics from the Politicians (The Penguin Press, 2007). For more information, visit www.lauraflanders.com.
RESIST awards grants six times a year to groups throughout the United States engaged in activism for social and economic justice. In this issue of the Newsletter we list a few grant recipients from our October 2007 allocation cycle. For information, contact the groups at the addresses below.

Ex-Prisoners and Prisoners Organizing for Community Advancement (EPOCA)
4 King Street, Worcester, MA 01610
www.massepoca.org

Founded in 2004, EPOCA is comprised of ex-prisoners, their allies, friends and families working to reform the criminal justice system and improve treatment of ex-prisoners. Its New Leaf program helps working by pointing out the benefits to both the employer and employee. Currently EPOCA is working to reform the CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) system, a major stumbling block for ex-prisoners looking for employment.

EPOCA received a grant of $3,000 to continue its work towards criminal justice reform and the fair treatment of ex-prisoners.

Rhode Island Jobs with Justice
431 Washington Street, Providence, RI 02903; www.rijwj.org

In 1996, local unions and community organizations formed Rhode Island Jobs with Justice to build a culture of solidarity and harness a collective power to deliver tangible victories for working families. They work to improve and defend working families' standards of living, job security and the rights of workers to organize. Recently, the group helped the janitors' union in downtown Providence negotiate improved wages, putting them in a position to win health care and other crucial workplace improvements in upcoming contract negotiations.

A $3,000 multi-year grant from RESIST will provide general support for this coalition of labor, community, faith-based and student groups.

Coalition Against Militarism In Our Schools (CAMS)
PO Box 3012, South Pasadena, CA 91031; www.militaryfreeschools.org

The Coalition Against Militarism In Our Schools started in 2003 following the invasion of Iraq as a small group of teachers, students, community members and organizations. Its mission is to empower and educate students on issues regarding military recruitment. The group has dramatically increased the number of students signing "opt-out" forms (from 8,000 in 2003 to 18,000 in 2006) which prevents students' private information from automatically being released to the military. CAMS continues to pass out leaflets and brochures, hold educational workshops and training sessions and raise awareness of military recruitment tactics and viable alternatives to military service for students.

A grant of $3,000 from RESIST will support the goal of reducing military presence in schools and presenting students with positive alternatives to military service.

Desiree Alliance
2756 N. Green Parkway, #104, Henderson, NV 89014; www.desireealliance.org

Formed in 2005, the Desiree Alliance is a coalition of health workers, social scientists, sex educators, sex professionals and their supporting networks working together for an improved understanding of the sex industry and its human, social and political impacts. Its goal is to build leadership and constructive activism among sex workers to advocate for their human, labor and civil rights.

RESIST's general support grant of $3,000 will assist the Desiree Alliance to empower sex workers in their pursuit of civil, labor and human rights.

Social Change Needs You!
Your contribution to RESIST today will support hundreds of radical groups across the country.
You can either make a one-time gift, or better yet, join the Pledge program. By becoming a Pledge, you help create a dependable source of income on which RESIST can build our grant-making program. In return for your pledge, we will keep you up-to-date on the groups your contributions make possible.

So take the plunge and become a RESIST Pledge! We count on you, and the groups we fund count on us.

I'll send you my pledge of $_____ every month/quarter/six months/year (please circle one).
Enclosed is an initial pledge contribution of $______.
Please automatically deduct my pledge from my credit card (below).
Here is a one-time contribution of $______ to support your work.

Name ____________________________
Address ___________________________
Phone number/e-mail (for confirmation only) ___________________________
Visa/Master Card # ___________________________
Expiration date ___________________________

RESIST • 259 Elm Street • Somerville • MA • 02144. Donations are tax-deductible.

Sharing the Gifts
To celebrate 40 years of funding social change, RESIST will give away an extra $40,000 to all of this year's grant recipients. Happy Anniversary, one and all!