

OUT OF THE BARREL OF THE PEN: BOOKS AS WEAPONS OF STRUGGLE

Ernesto Bustillos (March 7, 2010 RPMA)

After each presentation, you could hear the sounds of the “Chicano Unity Clap” and the “Viva La Raza”. It was a small, but powerful event. We are talking about the Raza Press and Media Association’s (RPMA) 4th Raza-Barrio Book Fest.

The Raza-Barrio Book Fest was held on Sat., March 6, 2010, at the Centro Cultural Francisco Villa, meeting hall and cultural center of Unión del Barrio. The “centro” is located in South Central Los Angeles – a working class/poor Mexican-Central American community- exactly where the RPMA believes all progressive and revolutionary media proponents should be concentrating their work.

THE TONE WAS MILITANT AND SPIRITED

Organized under the theme of “OUT OF THE BARREL OF THE PEN: BOOKS AS WEAPONS OF STRUGGLE”, by all accounts, the Book Fest was a great success. It was well attended and the audience included community activists, scholars, cultural workers, and students. Throughout the five hours of its duration, the Book Fest hall was standing room only. And, along with political posters, buttons, and T-Shirts, hundreds of books were on display and for sale.

The tone of the event was that of struggle and militancy. It began with an introduction and welcome to the Centro and the day’s agenda by Compañera Kelly Flores of Unión del Barrio. The facilitator of the Book Fest was Compañero Benjamin Prado, editor of *La Verdad* newspaper, who did an excellent job introducing panelists and moderating the discussions.

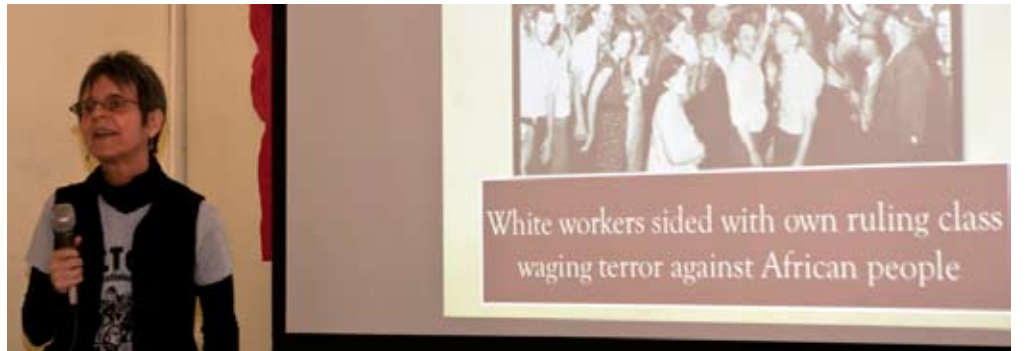
The day’s program also included cultural presentations of traditional Mexican songs by Lucía Laguna and a guitar solos played by Anthony Marin.

The presentations and dialogued that took place were motivational and spirited, as well as informative. Everyone appeared to be opened to revolutionary ideas and thoughts, and the quality of the scholars and activists who participated was without a doubt, impressive.

Excellent presentations were delivered by Francisco Romero (author of *Revolutionary Reflections*, Raza Press and Media Association and member of Unión del Barrio- Oxnard, CA) and Penny Hess (author of *Overturning The Culture Of Violence*, Chairwoman of



Raza-Barrio Book Sale/Exhibition



Penny Hess 3/6/10.



Book Sale/Exhibition.



Devra Weber, Benjamin Olguin, Irene Vasquez.



Victor Ochoa



Lucía Laguna



Centro F. Villa. (Foto by Victor Ochoa)



Kelly Flores

BUILDING A REVOLUTIONARY PRESS AND MEDIA



Francisco Romero



Benjamin Prado



Antonio Marin



Ernesto Bustillos, Lucia Laguna, Devra Weber, Benjamin Olguin, Irene Vasquez. (Foto Cristina Lares)

the African People's Solidarity Committee, St. Petersburg, Florida), the Book Fest keynote speakers.

The "Round Table" panelists included:

- Ernesto Bustillos (*Chicano Journalism: Its History and Its Use As A Weapon For Liberation*, San Diego)
- Lucia Laguna (Chicano Studies Student CSUN, member of Unión del Barrio)
- Victor Ochoa (*Chicano Park Murals*, muralist-artist, San Diego)
- Benjamin Olguin (*La Pinta: Chicana/o Prisoner Literature, Culture, and Politics*, San Antonio-University of Texas)
- Irene Vasquez (Editor, *Borders Within Us: Three Global Diasporas*, Associate Professor, CSU Dominguez Hills)
- Devra Weber (*Dark Sweat, White Gold: CA. Cotton, Farm Workers and the New Deal*, Professor UCR)

The panelists spoke on the importance of books and literature, and how their own work was related to the struggle for Raza self-determination and against all forms of oppression.

The Book Fest was of particular importance to our people's struggle for self-determination, precisely because it was able to bring together forces with diverse revolutionary, socialist, and progressive views. As was the aim of the Book Fest, it served as a revolutionary alternative to the mainstream and "Hispanic" book gatherings where profound questions are never asked or answered, and capitalism is upheld as something desirable. Hence, it contributed greatly to raising the social-political consciousness of our community and in creating a space for activists looking for an alternative to conformist and reformist politics.

LITERATURE AND BOOKS THAT SERVE THE WORKING CLASS

The success of the Book Fest was manifested by the amount of information and participation disseminated through the literature and discussions that took place. Despite differences, a very strong will to work together and to support the RPMA was demonstrated by everyone present. All seemed to uphold the necessity of collectively working together to pursue the goals outlined by the RPMA and expressed by some of the panelists:

- Building of a revolutionary Raza press and media.
- Production of information based on a working class perspective and in the service of our communities' struggles
- Challenge the "silence" of history and negation of our existence and struggles
- We must strive towards truly doing collective work.

The RPMA continues with its efforts to build the "media component" that our movement needs in order to transform itself into a real revolutionary-national liberation struggle. The Book Fest was another "building block" towards the construction of a revolutionary Raza media and in placing the RPMA as the leading Raza journalist-press organization within the movement for unity, justice, and liberation of Raza-Mexicanos!

A special recognition and appreciation goes to all RPMA members and activists/workers of the Centro Cultural Francisco Villa who did a tremendous job to ensure the success of the event. VENCEREMOS

[All fotos, with exception of two, by Oscar Michel/RPMA]