

Congreso de Barrios Fights Against Capitalist Greed!

YA BASTA: OUR BARRIOS ARE NOT FOR SALE!



General Assembly of Congreso de Barrios

On January 29, 2011, a historic gathering took place in San Diego, CA. Under the banner of “Ya Basta: Our Barrios Are Not For Sale”, more than 70 activists, teachers, students, and community residents participated in the “Congreso de Barrios”. Held at the Logan Heights Public Library, located in one of the oldest Mexican neighborhoods (Barrio Logan) in San Diego, the Congreso was organized by the Save Our Barrio Coalition (SOBC).

SOURCE OF CORRUPTION: GREEDY CAPITALISTS, GOVERNMENT, AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

The SOBC was founded in late November of 2009 by the Chicano Park Steering Committee, Brown Berets de Aztlán, and Unión del Barrio, with the objective of struggling against the destruction of our communities through a process called “Gentrification” –a process where communities, mostly African and Mexican-Raza, are demolished and redeveloped for the benefit of the rich.

Gentrification is driven by greedy capitalist developers, their flunkies in the city government, and so-called “community development agencies”. These agents of corruption have no regard for the culture, well being, or respect for the communities they destroy; all they care about are the profits to be made off the backs of oppressed and working class peoples.

Through its activities the SOBC fights to:

- Stop the cultural genocide, racism, and capitalist greed behind gentrification
- Create true democracy and voice for our communities
- Uphold rights of workers and the poor

The Congreso de Barrios had as its main goals the following:

- A. Learn and share information around the struggle to stop the Gentrification of our communities.
- B. Create a network of Barrios/Communities to oppose Gentrification.

C. Develop a “Community Plan” with demands and objectives that uphold the right to self-determination and a true democratic voice for all communities.

The Congreso was attended by people with a wide spectrum of political perspectives. These perspectives were represented by the over a dozen organizations that endorsed the event and those who attended: students, teachers/educators, community activists, residents, and labor union members.

OVER A DOZEN ORGANIZATIONS ARE REPRESENTED IN THE CONGRESS

Organizations who endorsed the event included: Association of Raza Educators (ARE), Raza Rights Coalition (RRC), MEChA SDSU, Barrio Maravilla Historical Society-Los Angeles, Committee On Raza Rights (CRR-Oxnard, CA), Mexicanos Unidos En Defensa del Pueblo (MUDP), MEChA Lincoln High School, MEChA San Diego City College, Movimiento del Pueblo Fronterizo (El Paso, Tejas), Raza Press and Media Association (RPMA), ILWU (International Longshore and Warehouse Union-29 San Diego), Committee On Chicano Rights (CCR, National City, CA), and Colectivo Zapatista.

The congress’ program itself was divided into three parts; (1) the welcome and introduction, (2) keynote address, and (3) three round table discussions.

The welcome and introduction was facilitated by the MCs of the Congreso, Monica Bernal and Blue Ramos (members of SOBC) and the keynote presentation was delivered by Pablo Aceves (Unión del Barrio).

The three round table discussions and its panels were:

1. *What is Gentrification, Why is it taking place? What’s behind it? –The political economy of Gentrification.*

• David Rico, Jr. (Brown Berets de Aztlán), Carlos Martell (Community Activist), Ben Rivera (Community Activist), and David Romo and Oscar Lozano (Movimiento del Pueblo Fronterizo-El Paso, Tejas)

2. *What are the ways that Gentrification affects the Community?*

• Evelin Torres (Association of Raza Educators), Tomas Huerta, Karen Salas and Andrea Amaya (Lincoln High MEChA), Francisco Romero (Committee On Raza Rights-Oxnard, CA), Amanda Perez and Eddie Revelez (Barrio Maravilla Historical Society-Los Angeles), and Raymond Leyba

(IULW) International Union of Longshore and Warehouse Workers-Local 29 San Diego)

3. *Fight Back: Redevelopment from the perspective of La Raza: Creating a plan that works for our communities.*

• Remigia Bermudez (Barrio Sherman Community Activist, teacher, and former City Planner), Ernesto Bustillos (Unión del Barrio), Adriana Jasso-Simon (Raza Rights Coalition), and Georgette Gomez (Environmental Health Coalition-San Diego)

WE MUST ORGANIZE OURSELVES: EL BARRIO NO VENDE, SE DEFIENDE!

Compa Pablo Aceves gave an excellent presentation explaining that, “We must organize ourselves and say, ‘No more community development without the community’.”

The Congreso was also enriched by the participation of the president of the International Union of Longshore and Warehouse Workers of San Diego, Raymond Leyba. Compa Leyba connected the struggle of unionized workers and the community. Another highlight of the Congreso was the presence of David Alvarez, recently elected to the City Council of San Diego, who engaged in dialogue (with those in attendance) over the question of gentrification and true community democracy.

Of particular interest to the Congreso was the presentation by the compas from El Paso, Tejas, Oscar Lozano and David Romo, who under the slogan “el barrio no se vende, se defiende” gave a presentation on the gentrification process in El Paso. They specifically exposed a capitalist project to create, along the whole length of the border, “Green Zones” for “industry” and sanitized areas from which working class Raza will be forced to move out.

A COMMUNITY PLAN THAT DEFENDS OUR COMMUNITIES

A key outcome of the Congreso was a “Community Plan” that will serve to save our communities. While it was written as a program for the community of Logan Heights, it is a plan that can be utilized by all Barrios, everywhere, who are fighting for survival. Consisting of 25 demands and proposals, the plan calls for the community to have the final say so in any redevelopment of their neighborhood. It also upholds the integrity, respect, and culture of the community as factors of paramount importance.

On March 13, 2011, the SOBC will hold a retreat to go over the issues and agreements that came out of the Congreso. Out of this retreat the SOBC will create a report that will be sent to all the participants and our communities. Venceremos!

*Raza Press and Media Association
Published 2/12/11*