

Save Our Barrios Coalition Unity Forum

"DIALOGUE ON STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH KEY COMMUNITY ISSUES"

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On Monday, Nov. 7th, 2011 the Save Our Barrios Coalition (SOBC) held a "Barrio Unity Forum" at the Sherman Heights Community Center (Barrio Sherman), San Diego, Califaztlán. The Save Our Barrios Coalition (SOBC) was formed on Oct. 2009 with the objective of fighting against the gentrification and destruction of our communities by rich corporations/developers and racist government agencies.

The main topic of the forum was "Dialogue On Strategies For Dealing With Key Community Issues". The forum was called for to discuss issues such as:

- Defending the community against gentrification and destruction
- Strategies to secure a fair share of public resources (parks, meeting spaces, gardens, schools, housing etc.)
- Unity strategies to defend against migra raids, police abuse, and other injustices.

While the turn out was small, the presentations were excellent and those attendance represented organizations or where individuals active in several Raza communities within the city of San Diego.

The presenters included Tommie Camarillo (Chicano Park Steering Committee-CPSC), Liliana Garcia (Historic Barrio District/Sherman Town Council), Georgette Gomez (Environmental Health Coalition), Carlos Martell (SOBC), Benjamin Prado (Unión del Barrio/Raza Rights Coalition-RRC), and Julio Soto (Association of Raza Educators -ARE).

Liliana Garcia (Sherman Town Council) gave a brief history of the Sherman Community Center of which she is a board member. Compañera Liliana described the crisis of lack of leadership and non-community atmosphere that often prevailed at the center. She explained that by



Benjamin Prado



Tommie Camarillo

including the term "Historic Barrio District" to the Sherman community, was part of a strategy against the "gentrification" policies promoted by the city government and large "pro-business" development corporations who only care about making money and nothing about the communities they are impacting.

After Liliana's presentation, the next speaker was Julio Soto (A.R.E.). Compa Julio gave a brief introduction to A.R.E. and some of the work educators were doing. He specifically touched upon the recent victory to make into law the "California Dream Act", which enables "undocumented" students to be admitted to the California State College and University systems the same as any other residents. Compa Julio also spoke on the need for educators to move from a theoretical understanding of education and limiting themselves to classroom instruction -to one that includes social activism.

The following speaker, Benjamin Prado (Unión del Barrio-UdB) prefaced his comments with UdB's position that you can't have peace and justice without taking into account that the land belongs to Mexicano-Indigenous people and that this has to be acknowledge by all those involved in the struggle for social justice. Compa Ben reviewed the just demands of the Raza Rights Coalition (RRC), which included union wages for all workers, free or affordable medical insurance, and community control of police in our neighborhoods. He closed his presentation by declaring that justice and real democracy, at the end of the day, is the working class in power.

Tommie Camarillo, the long time chairperson of the Chicano Park Steering and outstanding defender of the community, gave an overview of the current restoring of the Murals that is taking place at Chicano Park. She also updated those in attendance to the current struggle against forcing upon the park a "veterans' war memorial" (which looks like a generic plaque found most cemeteries) that has no relationship, culturally and his-

the greedy capitalists and racists are constantly conspiring to rip off our communities

torically, to the nature and character of Chicano Park. Compañera Tommie explained that the current proposed monument does not blend with the rest of the art and culture of Chicano Park (murals, kiosko, gardens, Zapata statue, etc.). She summed up her comments by saying that Zapata would be embarrassed having a monument such as the one proposed, next to him.

Compañera Georgette Gomez was the next to speak. She illustrated how the process of "redevelopment" impacts the community and specifically warned of the negative consequences of the "expansion of downtown" and the building of a football stadium will have on the adjacent neighborhoods of Sherman and Logan Heights. Compañera Georgette described how the land and business landlords, along with redevelopment corporations care little or nothing about the residents. She explained how at a recent public meeting on redevelopment, the business owners convinced their workers, through straight out deceit and lies, to speak against the interests of the community. Compañera proposed that those involved in the social struggle and betterment of our communities, find ways to get our message across and create the unity that will utilized what ever changes are made, as things that will benefit all of us.

The last presentation was made by Carlos Martell (SOBC). Compa Carlos explained who the SOBC was and its point of view in regards to the "gentrification" that was taken place in Logan Heights and other, mostly Mexicano, communities. He describe the strategy of the corporate-controlled city governments, a process in which certain communities are described as "blight", then consultants are hired to "study" and make recommendations, then "redevelopers" are paid to change the character of the community, which then leads to gentrification -resulting in the destruction of homes and displacement of its residents. Compa Carlos urged everyone to recognize our neighborhoods as "our land", that we are not immigrants, and the working class nature of our community.

The forum ending with a dialogue among the presenters and those in attendance. Everyone agreed to work together and support each other in our struggle to save our barrios and exposed the greedy capitalists and racists who are constantly conspiring to rip off our communities. Speaking for the SOBC, Compa Carlos informed everyone that more dialogues such as what took place at the forum -was something that the coalition will continue to organize. Venceremos!



Carlos Martell, Liliana Garcia-Rivera, Georgette Gomez, and Julio Soto